



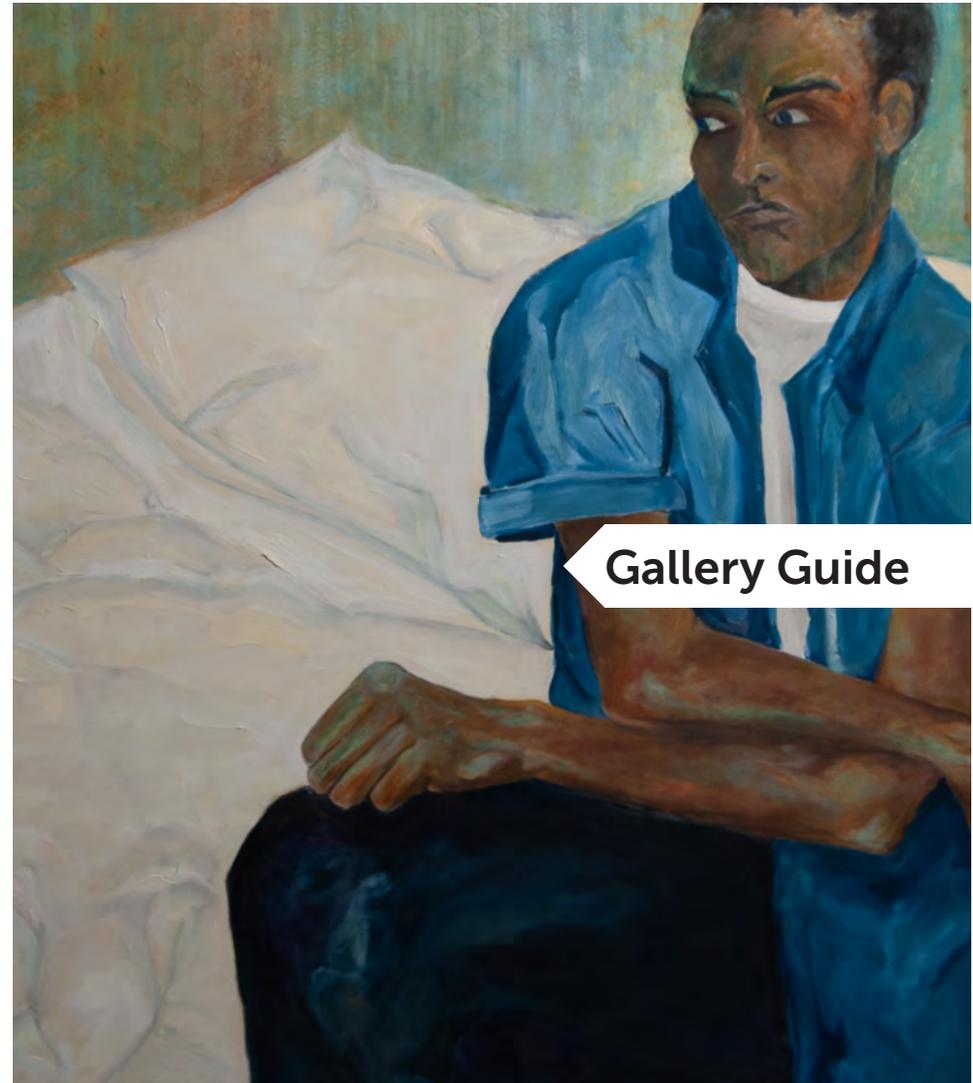
Old Love

For thousands of years, artists have been drawn to a human figure and used it as a subject matter of their art. Portraiture is one of the ways to show people in art. It allows artists to capture the person's physical likeness, personality, and even mood. Portrait is a painting, drawing, or photograph of a person that shows their likenesses.

You can see people in exhibitions by Mimi Fenton. Fenton paints the oversized figures larger than their canvas; they seem to be running out of space uncontained by their frames. Each figure is shown in a private, inward moment (caught off-guard) and depicted in a posture that shows complex emotion. The body language and facial expression are important when painting people as they can reveal the person's mood, feelings, and state of mind.

Choose one of the works in this gallery.

**How do you think the person in this picture is feeling, or what is their mood? How can you tell?**



Gallery Guide

## HOLDING IN COMMON MIMI FENTON

May 28 - August 15, 2021



# ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mimi Fenton is a painter and Renaissance scholar in Laramie, Wyoming. Until recently, she lived and taught in the mountains of North Carolina, where she began painting. Fenton has published four books on the poet John Milton, was a Fulbright Scholar in Budapest, Hungary, and is a Distinguished Alumna of the University of Wyoming. She currently divides her time between teaching literature at UW and working in her studio.

## Artist Statement

Why paint, and why paint people? Because, as Renaissance literature teaches, individuals are inimitable and never fully knowable. Because, even now, "what has been said is still not enough."

I work from early modern definitions where an individual means indivisible and originality means connection with origins, so my large-scale figurative oil paintings present individuals who fuse history with contemporaneity, self with context.

I love every step of creating a painting: research and conceptualization, production, and revision. My paintings originate in poetry or music lyrics. Symbolic colors and intense marks—a nod to expressionism's insistence on the physicality of paint—do intend interpretive meanings, contingent as they are.

Foregrounding bodies as overfull vessels of interiority that cannot be fully seen--each is cropped or cramped—makes the canvas a metaphor for defining and confining forces—contexts from which individuals are indivisible. Context is not a locale or situation. The semiotics of posture, anatomy, clothing, and material reveal both interiority and context: identity politics and power hierarchies. For instance, androgynous figures with enlarged hands and feet and powerful old women defy essentialist reductions of beauty, aging, and female agency. People in conflict are fragmented physically and collectively. People are isolated together. Maps are "embodied" because place shapes individuals and places belong within the self.



Leonardo Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, 1503-1506

Fenton's portraits in this series emphasize individualism. The concept has waxed and waned in popularity throughout Western History. The rebirth of the idea came after the Mediaeval period, as cultures moved toward a more autonomous and self-focused sense during the Renaissance. Innovations in tools and machinery such as the printing press and social ideas like capitalism drove the concept of individualism to be the prevailing philosophy of the modern Western world.

Individualism is a social theory advocating the liberty and rights of the individual. It highlights human reason and innovation. Examples of individualism in art became prevalent during the Renaissance and include an artist signing their name to an artwork they created or painting or sculpting art that portrays humans as important and unique.

The most famous example of Individualistic art is Leonardo Da Vinci's La Gioconda (better known as the Mona Lisa) from the early 16th century. This painting is of a noblewoman, and it does not contain any sort of religious or mythological aspect. Instead, it focuses on the human subject and the many physical qualities that she possesses. **So how do Fenton's portraits emphasize individualism?**