

# Soma

(by Kaley Pederson)



This piece reflects my reaction while reading Annabel Lyon's *The Golden Mean* and is my first experience painting. Painting fed a need to display the emotions I felt based on my interpretation of the character's struggle to find happiness within their lives. Mostly, it is influenced by my perception of Aristotle and Alexander's affliction to find balance of what was considered an imbalance of bile - the humeral disease.

Generally, it represents a fight to find balance or existence between two very opposing extremes. The ambiguous forms are meant to impress a figureless and faceless understanding of struggle. The efforts of the figures should be interpreted as absorbing to the point of obsession with each other. In the need to exist, a stifling attitude towards each other becomes reality, as they struggle to dominate each other. This domination is inspired by the dysfunctional social mechanisms displayed throughout the novel, such as alcoholism, sex addiction, and other obsessive behaviors. In an attempt to gain control over their lives, it was my view that many characters relied on these coping mechanisms to rebalance themselves. In their efforts to find happiness or success, one extreme was shown to be fully satisfied, through the overindulgence or abstinence of sex, alcohol, and other pursuits that reflect obsessive attitudes. Ultimately, the fulfillment of one extreme such as abstinence dominates the other, excess, or vice versa. This becomes the affliction each extreme struggles with as shown through the different posturing of forms in the painting because only one can exist at once. I saw it as a cyclic pattern of filling up in order to cope or survive with life. Although, this as I read in the novel is not a way of life, the importance of controlling a proper balance leads to a stable life and success.

In the middle of the painting, there is a flowerlike form that symbolizes the idealized point of balance - the Golden Mean. Even though the figure is manifested through the achievement of balance, it is however, incorporated into the painting in a different attitude. Its purpose is to convey a balance that is continuously attacked by the struggle both extremes have to overpower each other. This is inspired by what I considered Aristotle's lack of resolution in finding lasting balance within himself and failure of teaching it to Alexander. Even with so much effort, the Golden Mean seems unattainable, an impossible achievement for individuals living with somewhat hedonistic views on needs and satisfaction.

The colors used are inspired by the theory of humeral disease. It includes the assumption that the humors were affected by a year's seasons. I tried to create an impression of the change in seasons, through use of browns, greens, orange, and yellow. The colors are also associated to black bile, phlegm and colors as described by Aristotle throughout the novel. I attempted to characterize the colors by giving them an archetypical association to good and evil as well. The black, like a snake, attempts to penetrate its way into the Mean in order to destroy it. As any man who values control and balance, in the time of the Romans, overindulgence seemed like a very seducing factor that could slither into a man's resolve and destroy it. The white color attempts to pull the form apart in a more graceful, gentler way, one that whispers salvation. This relates to a religious position of opposing evil through abstinence but like evil, it is still an extreme. The red ropes display the extent the Mean will fight in an attempt to actualize its own existence. This symbolizes the strength in Aristotle's devotion towards his philosophy of the Golden Mean and his efforts to achieve that balance.