

Impressions Left by Isadora Duncan: A Brief Breakdown



After creating this digital painting I felt compelled to write this short blurb in an attempt to share some of the magical and inspiring quotes and bits of information I came across in my research process. This painting represents a culmination of research from all sources listed in the bibliography but I will focus largely on Jankowski's article which I found particularly inspiring.

My creative process for this painting began as soon as I had seen images of Isadora Duncan in the lecture slides. Her captured poses had this majestic aura that I felt would create a strong character portrait. My inspiration was taken even further upon finding images in my research articles and when looking for the imagery section of the project. She was often photographed alone and in delicate yet powerful poses that, especially in her signature wrapped tunic wardrobe, were similar to a classic Greek statue. This is why I included lots of texture in the digital brushes I chose to create the painting. I also depicted her alone with lighting similar to that of a spotlight, reminiscent of all her solo works where she filled the stage by herself with orchestra accompaniment as no other had before (Dwyer 1).

I also knew that the painting shouldn't just be strictly representational/realistic. Much of what made Duncan so captivating to her audiences was her ability to represent things that were beyond human form: from nature to highly philosophical concepts. Jankowski found, "Reviewers and dance critics who saw her perform tended to focus on Duncan as metaphor ... linking Duncan's movement to realms of metaphysics and nature— the soul and the earth—rather than dealing with her physical presence" (Jankowski 84). For this reason, I included abstract, colourful, and motion blurred figures from nature. The green lines are those of a tree, the blue a bird, and pink an assortment of flowers and petals. I found that Duncan's typical poses intertwined very well with the shapes naturally found in these natural beings. This was likely similar to Etscher's finding written in a review of Duncan: "Her gestures always spread from the center like a flower unfolding its petals; the arms part from the body, the hands open, the fingers unroll, the movement takes more amplitude like the regular and progressive wave born from the falling of a stone in a quiet lake" (qtd. Jankowski 84). While I used no footage of her dancing, this and many other quotes in the Jankowski article were full of very profound imagery that I felt painted a clear image of her movement in my head, which I tried to capture in my work.

Gertrude Stein's "Orta or One Dancing" transcribes Duncan's movements through linguistic rhythms in a way that Johnathon Appels deems "a form of writing in motion" (qtd. Jankowski 85). As a modernist writer, Stein was pushing the boundaries of her writing and was compelled to do so in an attempt to capture Isadora's most captivating qualities. Appels sees handwriting as "an extension of the writer's body that accesses the "gestural sweep and melodic incantation" of Duncan's dance, and likening [Stein's] "belief in emphasis, insistence, and motion" more to the art of the dancer than to a type-script (qtd. Jankowski 85). Additionally, after analyzing the connection between the works and minds of Isadora Duncan and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, Peters poetically concludes that "both have to deal with words where they would rather dance" (215). After coming across both these points in my research I knew I should include some handwriting in the painting. I splattered some of the words used to describe Duncan from my research all over the canvas to represent the writers' wholehearted fascination with Duncan's ability to inspire deep and heartfelt writing while trying to express what words could not in the way Duncan did.

As a side note, I was very pleasantly surprised to find a relationship between Duncan and Nietzsche. I had previously studied his existentialistic work in a previous elective class and had found some of his perspectives remarkably interesting. This made me feel even closer to my portrait's subject and more inspired to portray the creative mind that she was.

These are just a couple of examples of points in my research that I used to develop the artwork, but I simply wished to share a little bit of the thinking behind the painting. I hope you enjoyed them as much as I did and thank you for reading!