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Portrait painting in action at Stanford

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It was the start of a slow duet, expected to take until the end of May for Fortin to fire off any number of single-spaced one-page stories, while Gangloff attempts to finish one large painting. The whole process,

which may include failing and starting all over, amounts to "Artist at Work 2017: Hope Gangloff" and is open to spectators at Cantor.



The main entrance to the Stanford University museum, built in 1894, has been converted into Gangloff's studio as the first in a five-year series called the Diekman Contemporary Commissions Program, underwritten by arts benefactors John and Sue Diekman.

"This is about inviting in artists to activate a very traditional space," says Cantor Assistant Curator Jennifer Carty, who describes it as "performative." Carty will refine that concept at a 1 p.m. lecture Thursday, May 25.

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There is a lot to tell because Gangloff, 42, lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., and drove out in her Subaru with her boxer mutt Olly, and all her paints and brushes and buckets. She was three days late due to a tornado in Nebraska, a whiteout in Colorado and a crisis in the Utah desert (she ran low on oil and had to backtrack to Colorado).

Gangloff will put up with a lot, but she won't put up with boarding an airplane, which is why she drove. She also won't put up with having her face photographed. The artist wants to show other people's faces, not her own.

And those are only the faces of people she knows. She doesn't paint strangers. She knew Fortin from a previous project at Michigan State, and it is just coincidence that Fortin now works at Cantor as an executive assistant.



“She’s a fun challenge,” says Gangloff, as Fortin clacks away in single space, working that carriage return, her salt-and-pepper hair blending nicely with the marble wall behind her. The typewriter sits on a pullout tray at a midcentury metal office desk. Scattered around are a metal lunch box in red tartan, a bottle of Wite-Out, a magnifying glass and any number of dictionaries and art history books open for quick reference, plus a Princess dial phone with the receiver off the hook and dangling to the floor so she won’t be distracted by a caller.

There is a lot of detail to capture, and those who can't wait around to see the finished product can go upstairs where the concurrent show “Hope Gangloff Curates Portraiture” is on the balcony. There is a whole wall of portraits, and visitors can turn around and lean over the railing to see the next one being worked on at the bottom of the stairs.

The painting of Fortin will become part of the exhibit upon completion, but when asked when that might be, Gangloff says, “I don’t know. It depends on if you guys have an earthquake.” In the absence of that, Gangloff promises to be at work from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm weekdays, and probably a lot longer than that on weekends, too.

“Hope is an incredibly talented painter who evokes the 19th and 20th century masters and updates the tradition,” says Carty. “To see an artist at her level working in front of visitors is a rare opportunity.”

There might be a chance to see an artist admit defeat and start over. That’s why there are two wooden panels instead of one. She has pre-painted them both with blocks of color in case she trashes the first.

“I try to go into things with total enthusiasm,” she says, “and zero expectations.”

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