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Braided Brain



Braided Brain 1
Oil on canvas board
24 x 30 cm
2025

Introduction

This article is an invitation to step into the world of painting—an intellectual endeavor that extends far beyond the framework of simple self-expression. By deciphering the work *Braided Brain* alongside me, the author and artist, I hope to inspire you to explore painting yourself. At the very least, I wish to convey how painting is a vital activity that connects the body and mind, theory and practice, logic and belief, and everything that lies beyond.

For an artist, speaking about one's own work is always a significant challenge. Sometimes, we don't fully understand what we are aiming for during the creative process; more importantly, there is a desire not to destroy the magic or mystery of a piece with unnecessary chatter. "Art should speak for itself," "Artists shouldn't explain too much"—traditionally, silence has been lauded as an artistic virtue. However, if someone dislikes you for "talking too much," I personally would encourage you to keep talking. And, if possible, even louder.

With that in mind, I will record a few thoughts here regarding my own work.

Background of the Work

Looking back at the context in which this painting was born, I realized that several factors influenced the motifs of the piece.

First, I have long had a desire to depict a "girl"—a young girl lost in deep thought. At the time, I was reading news about how powerful figures worldwide, including Donald Trump, were sexually exploiting young girls. I was looking for a way to vent my anger, frustration, and deep sorrow regarding this issue. Having encountered sexual predators more than once in my own past, my thoughts turned to those experiences as well. While I feel rage, the inherent charm of a young girl and the psychology of adults captivated by it also pique my intellectual curiosity. In the notorious masterpiece *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert confesses his ecstasy and agony regarding his own sexual interests. The theme of the "girl" remains a perennial object of fascination for all art forms.

Second, I recently had the opportunity to speak with someone suffering from past trauma. Following that conversation, my own traumatic memories resurfaced vividly. These flashbacks are typical symptoms of PTSD, which I have experienced many times. However, instead of being overwhelmed as I had been before, this time I felt a certain "strength" within me. I realized I no longer felt fear or shame regarding what happened to me or what I had done in the past. To say I am completely over it would be a lie, but I felt ready to accept the facts as they are. I noticed a shift in my internal mode—a readiness to stop demonizing and condemning the perpetrators or my past self, and simply move forward. I felt that by approaching the motif of the "suffering girl," I could perhaps narrate my experiences—which I previously could only discuss emotionally—from a more bird's-eye perspective.

Third, I was thinking about the "politics of hairstyles" and how people overreact to the most trivial things. Matters regarding the simple fact that "others are others"—such as mental health, sexual minorities, tattoos, racism, and unconventional hairstyles—trigger wars or collective hatred toward strangers. I focused specifically on how the "braided" style can sometimes be provocative. I think everyone has felt that there are incredibly complex protocols regarding men having long hair, depending on the culture, age group, or social attributes. One often hears comments like, "It's fine for you because it suits you," or "That hairstyle won't fly in [certain environments]." I often braid my husband's beautiful long hair, but I recently learned that the mere fact that a healthy, heterosexual Dutch man has his long hair braided can evoke intense disgust even in someone who is supposed to love him deeply. A vague consciousness that "long hair on men is wrong" permeates society, turning the act of maintaining long hair into a political statement. I found this phenomenon fascinating, which gave me the inspiration for "a brain visually intertwined with braided hair."

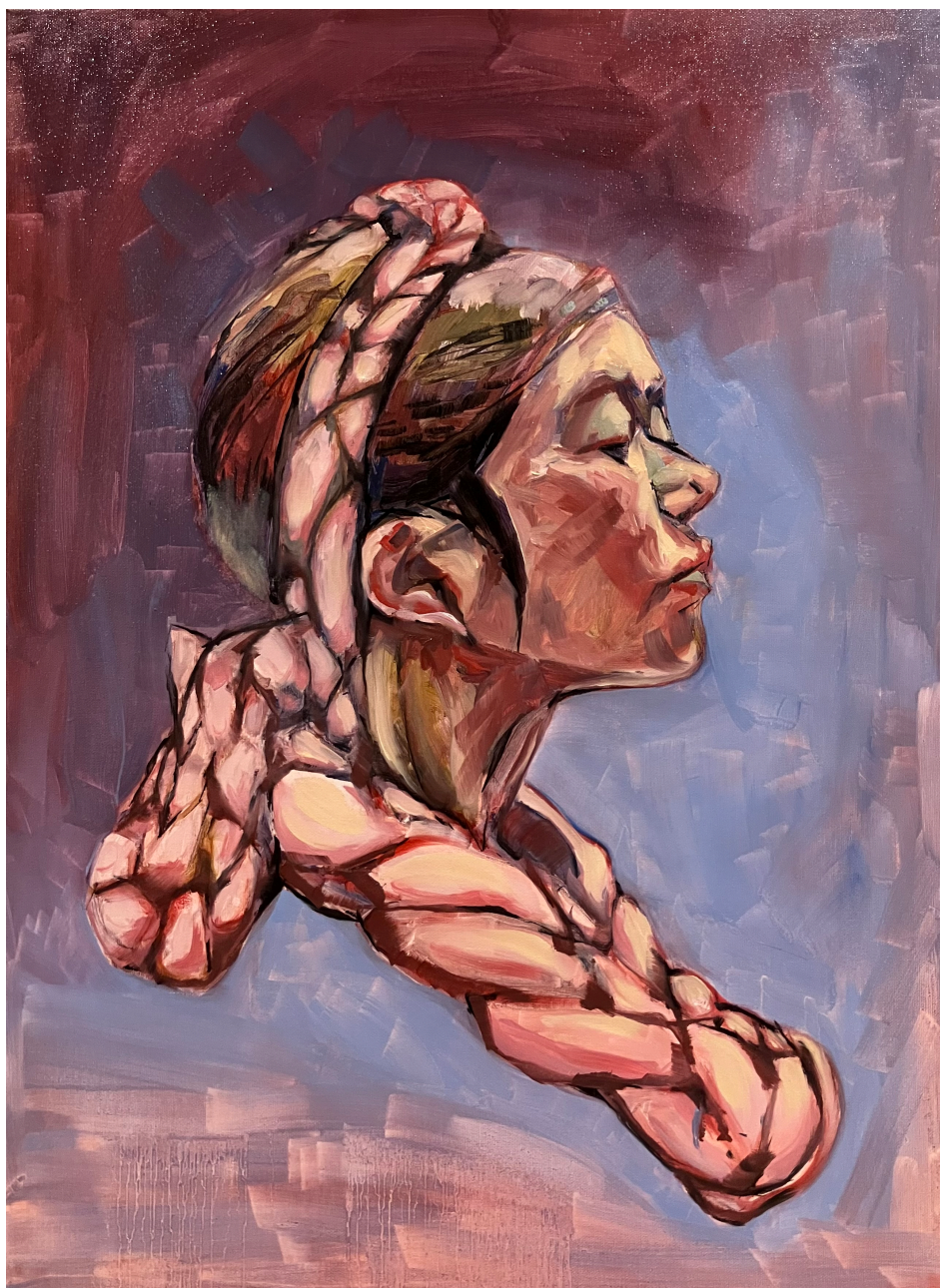
Fourth, I was recently watching *Stranger Things* with my husband, and the villain Vecna definitely made a guest appearance in my visual elements by sweeping into my subconscious. Vecna's appearance—skin burned off as a result of his battle with Eleven, with abnormally developed organs exposed—is striking. The removal of skin is always an interesting metaphor, and "abnormal development" is equally intriguing from a visual, artistic, and philosophical standpoint.

Fifth, I was searching for a theme I could continue to explore through my paintings. When I studied architecture at university, there was always a personal philosophical theme behind every design project I undertook. As an artist seeking a theme that could be delved into both visually and intellectually, I felt that *Braided Brain* was exactly that.

Analysis

To my eyes, as the one who painted it, the finished work depicts a girl processing events. She is processing traumatic experiences from the past, present, and future. She is in a moment of learning: how the world treats her with a unique harshness simply because she is a "girl"; that monsters exist close by; and that in certain situations, she is utterly powerless, regardless of how hard she tries or how much goodwill she possesses. She is currently "digesting" that reality within herself. Rather than emphasizing the hardships of being a woman, I feel a curiosity to use the pain of one girl to cut into and peer through the distortions of this world and the suffering of humanity as a whole.

Of course, you are more than welcome to see it in a completely different way. This is, after all, just the chatter of a painter, not the imposition of values. If you look at the painting with your own eyes, feel something, and share it with me, it would be the greatest joy for a painter!



Braided Brain 2
Oil on canvas
55 x 75 cm
2025