The human figure in art is a primary locus for engendering poetic regard. The immanent beauty of the human figure in art bears tenderly upon human intelligence, with an immediate and enduring accessibility. The sublime mastery of representing the human figure is wholly evocative, and calls upon multiple layers of understanding. It represents a powerful continuity of artistic tradition through the centuries, and brings to recognition the synthesis of many disciplines.

While the representation of the human figure conveys a true sense of technical ability, it also reveals the authenticity of the human touch. Figurative art confronts the likeness of self and others. It elicits a response simply by its silence, and challenges the disaffected way of learning, outside of mere utility. Its stillness awakens the abilities of the mind and heart to wonder and to marvel at our human existence.

Poetic regard is a human capacity which exists in the viewer, the artist, and the work of art. It is a heightened awareness of the quality of looking. It can be practiced, and become an acquired disposition of being fully present to a work of art. Poetic regard ultimately seeks to give form to this seeing — to give expression to and make known one’s deep understanding and appreciation.

The selection of works will be comprised of twenty-five to thirty works, focusing on painting, drawing, and sculpture. Iain MacLellan, director of the Chapel Art Center, along with the Center’s assistant curator Jessica Pappathan and guest curator John O’Hern, will lead a selected panel of invited faculty and guests in discovering
elements of poetic regard, to construct a framework of appreciation for these works.

Elements of poetic regard in figural works might include: signs of direct observation, mastery of form and reverence for physicality, the allure of compelling and interactive compositions, a profound understanding of brilliance and color, tenderness and gentleness of approach, a balance of subtlety and forcefulness, deep sympathy for human existence, intriguing narrative content and metaphoric meaning.

The complement of seminars, lectures, visits with artists, performances and poetry readings will encourage participation with other colleges and art institutions in the region. A Figural Presence is motivated by a desire to be engaged in a communal dialogue of discernment, towards mutual agreement about the essence of visual poetic discovery in significant works of figural art.

DR. ANNETTE BLAUGRUND, former director of the National Academy of Fine Arts and independent scholar, will offer an insightful essay for the accompanying exhibition folio.

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pastel and charcoal on paper, 2003
Permanent Collection, Alva deMar Megan Chapel Art Center

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