

Running Out of Time

Halley Beebe

Acrylic Paint

18 x 24 inches



Artist Statement

This piece is titled *Running Out of Time*. I wanted to animate the pressure from society to achieve—which is called the social clock—that women receive disproportionately to men. As Yelnur Shildibekov, PhD wrote in his article *Social Clock in Psychology: Definition, Origin & Impact*, “The very definition of the social clock dictates implicit societal expectations and puts pressure on individuals to achieve these milestones within a specified time frame” (2024). The reference I used is a still image of Amanda Seyfried in the movie *Jennifer’s Body*, directed by Karyn Kusama. I used acrylic paint as my medium.

The woman in the artwork symbolizes all women suffering under patriarchal societies. Surrounding her are four clocks, three of which are intentionally distorted—one with Roman numerals out of order, another with extra hands, and a third with its numbers flipped upside down. Her gaze is fixed on the only “normal” clock, which represents the pressure on women to conform to what society deems the perfect timeline. In my view, some of the most demanding expectations include marrying and having children relatively early, which often pushes education and career aspirations aside. The distorted clocks represent alternative life paths that diverge from these norms; although they still mark time, their confusing and unsettling designs reflect society’s scorn for those who don’t adhere to traditional gender expectations. The woman’s hair, wrapped and tangled around the clocks, symbolizes the struggle women face when trying to untether themselves from patriarchal constraints. The floating clocks suggest that these social roles are fabricated constructs, made real only through collective belief and behavior. The woman’s expression of apprehension, along with her drained complexion, conveys the emotional and physical exhaustion caused by the pressures surrounding her. Finally, the overlapping of the figures within the tight composition creates a sense of claustrophobia, mirroring the anxiety of feeling as though one is never moving quickly enough to meet societal expectations.

There is no best path to choose in terms of this painting. No clock is broken, but the perception of how they’re portrayed clearly implies it. As this painting highlights the struggles of women in a patriarchal society, the change I’d want to make is to give women the same freedom men have to create a life for themselves. In the United States specifically, this is not a change that can be addressed through legislation—the oppression is purely social. Therefore, the only change that can address the issue is a reframing of expectations for women. A change in beliefs enacted worldwide would ensure women are given equal opportunities to pave their way in life, without the ticking clocks of expectations distracting them from their passions.