

WHAT THE WHAT?

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Laguna College of Art & Design

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

May 2012

Laguna College of Art and Design
Master of Fine Arts Thesis Approval
Signature Page

Title of Thesis: What the What?

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ABSTRACT

I am currently making paintings of the guys I know and love and like to look at, using bits and pieces of the commercial imagery we're all constantly bombarded with via TV, movies, magazines, the Internet, billboards, and even iPhone apps. There is no end to the number of often meaningless composite images that compete for our attention and try to address our particular wants and needs or, in many cases, to tell us what our wants and needs should be. Unlike the messages that we received through popular culture early in the consumer age--I'm thinking of popular imagery of the 1950s in particular, when men were supposed to be heroic, Marlboro men types-- it seems as if it's no longer possible to filter through the complex virtual web we've fashioned, to find a clear narrative about what exactly is heroic and worth valuing collectively. I see a parallel between this confusion and the messy, listless ways we seem to be prolonging our adolescent lives well into adulthood daunted by the number of choices available to us. I'm painting my guys as if they are the male leads of a show with no clear plot. In total, I completed nine paintings centered around this idea. This includes three large pieces: 30"x40", 31"x44", and 36"x48", two medium-sized 18"x24" works, and four small, 16"x20" pieces. The small and medium sized works are oil on birch panel. The largest paintings are both oil on canvas and the smallest of the large set is oil on linen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank all the guys who posed for me including those I haven't painted just yet. I also want to thank Wes Christensen, Perin Mahler, John Brosio and Joseph Todorovitch for all their professional advice and support. And, of course, thank you to my friends and family: Mom, Dad, Laura, Kevin, Selenia, Alex, and Sarah. Thanks for putting up with my shit and constantly encouraging me even though I'm really good at discouraging myself.

DEDICATION

For Kevin.

No. I'm actually just testing to see if you'll read this.

No, no. I kid. This is not a test. This is for you.

EPIGRAPH

"People are always saying you should be yourself, like yourself is this definite thing, like a toaster. Like you know what it even is."

Angela Chase played by Claire Danes in *My So-Called Life* (qtd. in "Generation Catalano"
n.p.)

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DESCRIPTION

Prior to coming to LCAD, I spent ten years living in Las Vegas where, after receiving my B.F.A at UNLV, I went on to work as a studio artist at Madame Tussauds. For ten years I mended broken fingers, cleaned the clothes, and repainted wax likenesses of all manner of celebrities. The time I spent in Las Vegas and the work I did at Tussauds provided inspirational fodder for the paintings that I came to Laguna wanting to make. Las Vegas is unique in that it breaks down traditional, cultural norms in certain ways, and magnifies them in others. For example, socioeconomic divisions don't operate in Vegas the same way they do in other American cities. A valet parking attendant with no college degree can make six figures a year, and the rich and poor come together in the Strip's casinos. Dave Hickey addresses this uniqueness in his book *Air Guitar* when he discusses Vegas's detractors.

These exiles... find Las Vegas lacking in culture (Define culture!). They think it is all about money, which I always agree, is the worst way of discriminating among individuals, except for all the others... I suspect that my unhappy colleagues are appalled by the fact that Vegas presents them with a flat-line social hierarchy—that... being a *professore* in this environment doesn't feel nearly as special as it might in Cambridge or Bloomington, simply because the rich... are not special in Las Vegas, because money here is just money. You can make a lot of it... but there are no socially sanctioned forms of status to ennoble one's having made it—nor any predetermined socio-cultural agendas that one might pursue as a consequence of having been so ennobled. (21)

Having grown up in an affluent suburb outside of Boston, Massachusetts, where the ideal outcome after graduating from high school would be acceptance into any one of the Ivy

League institutions that Hickey references, I too was captivated by the absence of any overt social ladder in Las Vegas. The architecture of the city itself reflects a new kind of socioeconomic world order. Surrounding the myriad high-rise luxury condominiums under construction currently on or close to the Strip, record numbers of homes have been abandoned due to foreclosure (Silva n.p.). The country's economic boom and bust has played out visibly on the desert landscape.

At the same time that class divides are distorted in Vegas, the boundaries between the world of fine art and the world of entertainment, the "highbrow" and the "lowbrow," are similarly confused. One can go see a Cirque du Soleil show--a theatrical/acrobatic/circus hybrid that always struck me as being the adult equivalent of a musical baby mobile-- and take in the private art collections of casino owners like Steve Wynn, which often include works by Picasso, Miro, and other big name artists, without ever leaving one's casino hotel.



Fig. 1. Madame Tussauds, *Jack Sparrow*, 2008, multimedia, life-sized

Madame Tussauds itself embodies an odd blend of highbrow and lowbrow representational art. Tussauds was established during the late 1700s-- a "period that saw the proliferation of museums, which were universally regarded as monuments to bourgeois culture, alongside a kaleidoscopic array of manifestations of popular culture, from circuses to magic lantern shows, providing entertainment appealing to the 'popular masses.' The former were apparently dominated by artistic considerations of good taste...the latter designed as spectacles and

driven by commercialism” (Pilbeam 23). The difficulty people have when attempting to categorize Tussauds continues today. There is an ongoing debate within the company over whether or not it should brand itself as a “museum” or an “interactive wax attraction.” Would it be more profitable for Tussauds to try fitting itself into the same marketing category as the Met or Disneyland? In an article entitled “Sealed in Wax” Hephzibah Anderson discusses the chaos inherent in the way Tussauds haphazardly groups famous figures from throughout the ages,

Part of the appeal of waxwork exhibits is the way they inevitably jumble history and geography, bringing together characters who likely never met. But the disorder of those displays strips history of its narrative and meaning... there’s Tiger Woods, ingloriously positioned opposite a fudge stand, looking presciently aware of his fall from grace. (n.p.)

Tussauds is a beautiful interactive example of the Frederic Jameson’s postmodern “schizophrenia” (“Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 135) and has directly influenced the subject matter—blurring of high and low cultural tropes--involved in my work.

The approach I’ve taken to painting portraits owes much to the cacophonous, confused American microcosm that is Vegas. The contrast between the idiosyncratic ways people live their lives and all the loud and largely empty razzle-dazzle of our culture’s current forms of entertainment, reflects a rapidly changing world in which young adults, myself and my friends included, are confronted with wildly varied life choices. Do I keep my quirky yet corporate Tussauds job, or try to make a living as a traditional painter? What city should I live in? Do I move back in with a parent at 31 to help pay an onerous student loan debt, or move in with my boyfriend... sister... a friend? What about marriage and kids?

When I look around at my peers--my male peers in particular, who, minus a biological clock, seem to be living their lives in various unsettled ways—I am left feeling all kinds of ambivalence in the same way I’m ambivalent about whatever Tussauds is or whatever Vegas is. In her book *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women has Turned Men into Boys*, Kay Hymowitz examines the new, pervasive problem of overwhelming choice facing today’s young adult and what a dramatic, new dilemma it is.

Preadulthood represents a momentous sociological development... It’s not exaggerating things to say that large numbers of single, young men and women living independently while also carrying enough disposable income in their wallets to avoid ever messing up their kitchens is something entirely new to human experience. The vast majority of humans have spent their lives as part of families—first, the one created by their own parents, and then... the one they entered through marriage—for the simple reason that no one... could survive on their own. (7)

The subjects in my paintings are all my 30-something friends and the work attempts to address public conceptions and confusion regarding a male, ideal type. Because men have been the dominant sex throughout human history, I’m struck hard by the fact that within the past fifty years or so, along with dramatic changes for women, men’s roles have been transformed as never before. The fact that it is no longer necessary for men and women to pair off, procreate, and take care of one another in any sort of linear order is problematic when it comes to the stories we tell about what men are expected to grow up and achieve. In an article entitled “The End of Men: How Women are taking control of Everything” from the July/August 2010 edition of the *Atlantic*, Hanna Rosin notes that there has been a sharp decline in male students in colleges and universities and rising numbers of women in the

work place, noting that “the postindustrial economy is indifferent to men’s size and strength” (60). She goes on to talk about how this shift has produced a new narrative about manhood in popular culture.

American pop culture keeps producing endless variations on the omega male, who ranks even below the beta in the wolf pack. This often-unemployed, romantically challenged loser can show up as a perpetual adolescent (in Judd Apatow’s *Knocked up* or *The 40-Year-Old-Virgin*), or as a charmless misanthrope (in Noah Baumbach’s *Greenberg*), or a happy couch potato (in a Bud Light Commercial). He can be sweet, bitter, nostalgic, or cynical, but he cannot figure out how to be a man. “We call each other ‘man,’” says Ben Stiller’s character in *Greenberg*, “but it’s a joke. It’s like imitating other people.” (70)

For me, popular culture has been acting as a bellwether that points to the fact that “manliness” is a concept that has become the subject of collective consternation. Here’s an abbreviated list of some additional movies and television shows that address various ways in which adult males continue to cling to childhood long after they probably should: *Reality Bites* (1994), *Swingers* (1996), *About a Boy* (2002), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Garden State* (2004), *I love you Man* (2009), *Jeff*, *Who Lives at Home* (2011), *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008), *Pineapple Express* (2008) and TV shows such as *Friends* (1994), *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (2005), *Flight of the Chonchords* (2007), *Entourage* (2004), and *Jersey Shore* (2009). Even the musical *Avenue Q* (2002) addresses the topic of prolonged adolescence with puppets.

Language and how we tell stories is of critical importance to me because at the same time that it creates a conceptual foundation for how we think about men and women as a

collective, it is the key component to *how* we think about ourselves and our specific identities. In an episode of a *Radiolab* podcast entitled “Words,” host Jad Abumrad interviews Jill Bolte Taylor who describes language’s importance when it comes to forming personal identity. She says,

Language is an ongoing information processing. It’s that constant reminder. I am, this is my name, this is all the data related to me, these are my likes and dislikes, these are my beliefs, I am an individual, I’m a single I am a solid. I am separate from you.

This is my name. (n.p.)

The program also features Neuropsychologist Paul Brucks who describes a theory which says that all anyone is when he or she thinks about his or her person is a narrative. “What we normally think of when we think about ourselves is really a story; it’s the story of what’s happened to that body over time” (n.p.).

The paintings that make up my thesis are visual explorations of these stories-- illustrations of my subject’s personal narratives using the aforementioned confused language of our popular culture’s riff on gender. We are reluctant to generalize and categorize--again, loaded words. And no one, myself included, wants to draw hard and fast lines in the sand about what men and women should or shouldn’t do. I believe that the language we use and our reluctance to use certain words when it comes to describing “manliness” is of critical importance. Scrutinizing Rosin’s ‘perpetual adolescent’ in paint seems like a good way of tackling a topic that language fails to. The story of the man-boy is a type of anti-narrative. In *What the What*, *Satyr Gamer* and *Kevin, Mike, and Stevie*, I’ve planted my male subjects firmly on the couch, the new natural habitat of modern man according to popular culture. I approached every piece--*DracuNeil*, *Joey and Griffin*, *The Fellas*, *Cupcake Dave*, *Mike G.*

Getting Two Tacos, and *World's Largest Gift Store*, as if it is either a snapshot from a play, a movie poster, advertisement, or a post on someone's Facebook page. These are paintings that act as if they are any number of images we see every day on the internet/TV/advertising. They are intentionally ambiguous because I want them to reflect the fact that they could be any one of a number of media images. Hopefully they function as faux advertisements in which, instead of playing the traditional male hero, these guys are playing the new man-boy in some sort of story.

This cultural trope about modern manliness (or lack-thereof) is a perfect example of what happens when a culture fails to come to a consensus as to what story it wants to tell about what it expects of its members.



Fig. 2. Andrea Pavles, *Kevin, Mike, and Stevie*, 2012, Oil on panel, 16" x 20"

Kevin, Mike, and Stevie, in particular, is a piece that grew out of my anxiety over the recession and how the shrinking job market has affected everyone around me. Being an unemployed or underemployed adult and having an overabundance of unwanted, and

subsequently stressful, free-time to try to fill is uniquely disconcerting. I didn't want the actual subject matter in the painting to deliver that message in a straight-forward narrative

way, but rather was hoping to let the sickly color scheme and the squashed space—space that is enveloped by a TV screen'esque border, allude to that base-line anxiety. I've cast Kevin, my boyfriend, and my friend Mike as a bro-guy twosome. The position of the viewer is that of a TV set. This is a sad, strange party. The cat in the hat, Mike's cat Stevie, could have actually had a hat attached to his head by the guys, much to his dismay or he could have donned a hat of his own free will. It's possible that he is an equal player much like the animals in any sci-fi fantasy movie or TV show--I was thinking of *Family Guy's* Brian in particular.

As with the stories we tell ourselves, the line here between fact and fiction is blurry. There is a tension for me, in this and my other paintings, between how much life imitates art and vice-versa, i.e., the factual circumstances surrounding these two 30-somethings does seem to mirror that of the characters in any of the aforementioned shows on the topic. At the same time however, by agreeing to let me photograph them for the piece, Kevin and Mike are knowingly playing their part in this fiction and are obviously more nuanced and high-functioning than the incompetent boobs that popular culture makes them out to be. Again, for me the notion of a 'story' and the very language that comprises a story is crucial. All of my male subjects are either mugging for the camera or making eye-contact directly with the viewer. At the same time that these are portraits of specific people with specific personalities, they are references to our culture's collective stories about guy-hood. And, like it or not, pop culture is telling us something important about real world shifts as Kay Hymowitz observes,

Skeptics will be quick to object that these are just popular-culture confections, and so they are. But they reflect real trends in the predicament of the sexes in the contemporary world. Articles and books with such title as "The End of Men," "Are

Men Necessary?,” *The Decline of Males*, “The Death of Macho,” “Women Will Rule the World,” and *Is There Anything Good About Men?* point toward a growing recognition that men are not thriving in today’s cultural and economic environment. (Hymowitz 5)

It’s possible that Mike and Kevin are as high functioning as they can be in a place like Las Vegas (where the reference photos for this painting were taken) amidst the current economic turmoil of the “Great Recession.” My hope is that the viewer will question whether or not these gentlemen are employed or in relationships with women. They’ve obviously got some free-time, but what are they doing with it? What are they supposed to do with it? This is the dilemma of the age we live in.



Fig. 3. Andrea Pavles, *What the What?*, 2010-2012, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48"

In *What the What*, I’ve painted Kevin multiple times, in various poses and various sizes reflecting an imaginary hierarchy that owes something to book covers and movie posters of the 1950s. Specifically, I referenced the movie poster illustrations of Reynold Brown in terms of the attitudes of the poses, overlapping figure composition and style of font for the imaginary movie title. Because I’m attempting to reflect ways in which the current conversation

about masculinity is changing, I wanted this painting to have a retro feel that would contrast a not-so-long ago time where men were supposed to be butch and heroic with the new, Seth Rogan- type character. I have always been drawn to illustrations from advertising and movie posters of the 50s because of the way in which they tout very clear standards for how men and women are supposed to behave.

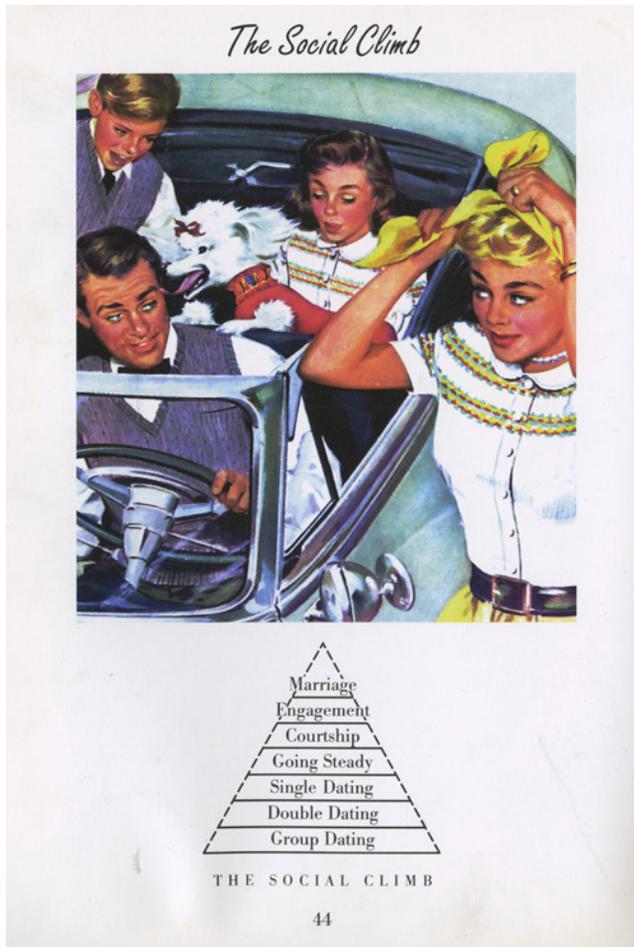


Fig. 4 Benjamin Darling, *Tips for Teens*, "The Social Climb," 44

Not only did these movie posters oversell the content of the movies they were depicting, but in the same way that the man-boy reflects our current stress surrounding a changing economy, these posters managed to reflect, by illustrating fictional conflicts, the very real conflicts of their day.

"Looked at today, these posters chronicle our anxieties (about sex, the Bomb, the enemy), our mores, our icons" (*Cinefantastique* 43). Kevin, as seen here, is not a hero, nor is he a Seth Rogan character; he is acting out both of those roles. He's shirtless and his

apparent readiness to attack or defend something is dubious.



Fig. 5 Reynold Brown, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, 1957, Gouache on board, 21.5" x 18.25"

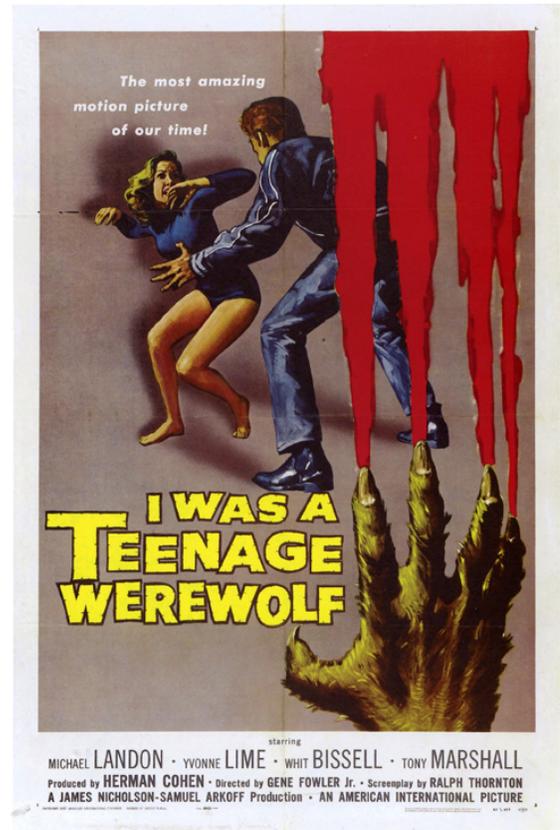


Fig 6 Reynold Brown, *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, 1957

There's no real drama or action in his day-to-day goings on. He's holding a comb instead of a gun. And the only bad guys he kills are the virtual foes in his video games. There is no damsel in distress around for him to defend because it's not all that clear that he's capable of doing so. The ghost-like, creepy-looking visage of our cat floating in the upper right hand corner is a reference to Brown's *Shrinking Man* poster, and is there because she is the only other actor in our house who could play the part of a bad-guy in this narrative of nothingness. The large scratch marks in the bottom left corner of the painting, a direct reference to Brown's *I was a Teenage Werewolf* poster, are about the only damage the cat can do and

even that basically only hurts the furniture. She's the atomically mutated, giant Ant of a Brown poster, or an enemy in an X-Box 360 game.



Fig. 7. Andrea Pavles, *Satyr Gamer*, 2010-2012, Oil on linen, 30" x 40"

In addition to drawing from movie posters of the 50s because of their exaggerated, heroic depictions of masculinity, I'm also drawn to depictions of fictional characters that embody archetypal male types. *Satyr Gamer* was born from the idea that the Satyr character and the man-boy are both exemplars of hedonism. It would have been easy enough to put a beer or a bong in Kevin's hands for this painting, but I was more interested in the idea that video game playing is a distinctly modern pastime, and liked the idea of

putting today's technology in the hands of a mythological character. Video gaming, along with all types of leisure activities, can be dangerous in large doses. Unlike the heavy drinking or serious women chasing that is both celebrated and scorned in paintings depicting satyrs, this activity is clearly a passive form of recreation that is closer to the sin of sloth than it is to the sin of gluttony. Extreme inaction is detrimental in its own right.

Drinking and partying are activities that require more testosterone than the average modern man has much use, energy, or money for-- at least not all the time. I was influenced by the *Barberini Faun*, a Roman copy of a Greek sculpture that I found strikingly stunning and sexual. Again, my shirtless boyfriend's torso isn't that of the chiseled marble statue, but I'm attracted to him regardless of the fact that, as seen here, he may not measure up to the highest societal standards of male physical attractiveness.

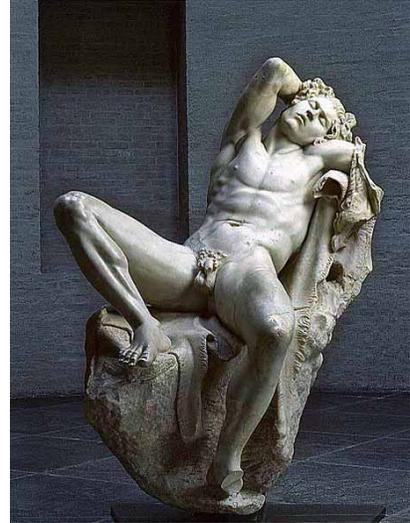


Fig. 8. Unknown Artist, *Barberini Faun*, c. 220 BC., Marble, The Glyptothek, Munich



Fig. 9. Andrea Pavles, *DracuNeil*, 2011, Oil on panel, 16" x 20"

In *DracuNeil*, I've used my friend Neil as an actor again, real or imagined, posing as the ever-popular vampire. Between Ann Rice novels, the *Twilight* franchise, and HBO's *True Blood*, this monstrous perennial favorite is masculine in an old-school kind of way. He is powerful, dangerous, and sexy. The number of films and books that keep getting recycled and remade involving vampires and similar masculine types seem to reflect our

collective longing for by-gone days when men were “manly.” One need look no further than *Mad Men*’s Don Draper, to see the way in which we seem to long for an alternative to Apatow’s heroes. In an article entitled “You Say You Want Devolution?” author Kurt Anderson addresses the way that this nostalgia reflects our collective discomfort with social and economic upheaval.

Ironically, new technology has reinforced the nostalgic cultural gaze: now that we have instant universal access to every old image and recorded sound, the future has arrived and it’s all about dreaming of the past. Our culture’s primary M.O. now consists of promiscuously and sometimes compulsively reviving and rejiggering old forms. It’s the rare “new” cultural artifact that doesn’t seem a lot like a cover version of something we’ve seen or heard before. Which means the very idea of datedness has lost the power it possessed... People have a limited capacity to embrace flux and strangeness and dissatisfaction, and right now we’re maxed out. So as the Web and artificially intelligent smartphones and the rise of China and 9/11 and the winners-take-all American economy and the Great Recession disrupt and transform our lives and hopes and dreams, we are clinging as never before to the familiar in matters of style and culture. (n.p.)



Fig. 10. James Bama, Aurora box cover art for *Dracula*, 1962

This particular version of Dracula has a day-job. He's a familiar character engaging in a familiar activity. He could be sporting a costume for an office Halloween party. The bat in the piece is clearly a decoration; it's hanging from the ceiling by a string. The composition was inspired by the 1962 Universal Pictures movie poster for *Dracula*.

This painting examines the vagaries of what is and what isn't a respectable occupation for men today. At Tussauds in Hollywood, where I currently work, I have to run the gauntlet of costumed street performers every time I walk to the attraction on Hollywood Boulevard. These folks dress up in costumes and pose for pictures with tourists for tips to make a living. There are multiple Supermen, Spidermen, and Jack Sparrows. The old Dracula costume would be a bit dated for this crowd, but I was thinking that the vampire in this painting could easily be one of these real-life characters. The fact that one can make a career

out of dressing up as one's favorite TV or movie personality is ideal for a young adult unwilling to grow up. Dressing up as Superman and posing for pictures seems like a fairly un-super manly occupation.

Because I have always maintained a deep and abiding love of popular culture, it strikes me as odd that many artists and art historians look askance at or dismiss illustration and popular culture outright. It seems that discussions of the break-down of the distance

between high and low culture, in the fine art world; reflect an anxiety consistent with the loss of the old, narrative for respectable, orderly “life scripts” (Hymowitz 9). This anxiety among modern art critics is addressed in *Art since 1900*:

ˆ Pastiche and textuality might now be seen as complementary symptoms of the same crisis of subjectivity and narrative that comprised ‘the postmodern condition’ for Lyotard, and of the same process of fragmentation and disorientation that informed ‘the cultural logic of late capitalism for Jameson. But then what exactly were this subjectivity and that narrative that were supposed to be in crisis in the first place? They were presumed to be general, even universal; critics of “the postmodern condition” soon came to see them as more particular—as *mostly white, middle-class, male, Western European and North American*. For some, any threat to this subjectivity and that narrative, to the great modern tradition, was indeed grave, and it provoked both laments and disavowals concerning the end of art. (italics added 599)

I find it interesting that at the same time certain artists and historians may be quick to dismiss much of what comes out of film, art (portraiture in particular) and film both help to reinforce and define social status based on wealth and fame. When it comes to Hollywood, we tend to focus our collective gaze on airbrushed and Photoshoped celebrities who play to the camera with knowing confidence and sex appeal. The ‘celebrity’ as a societal stand-out is not a new one and is certainly not limited to film. Portrait painting also has a long history of qualifying and celebrating the status of the individual. “Throughout recorded history the portrait’s novelty and scarcity were most directly the result of social and class distinctions. Portraits were for the “rich and famous” (Stainback n.p.). When it comes to painting, portraiture plays to a different audience than that of mass media--namely a selective few vs. as many as

possible, but like mass media, portrait painting knowingly depicts individuals for the scrutiny of an audience and the tools that it uses to do that are specific and telling.

At the same time that we still seem to be clinging to our old fascination with celebrity, what makes a person famous, like everything else in our rapidly shifting media landscape, is changing.

The word “celebrity” is no longer restricted to an elite circle of the rich and glamorous. With fame comes celebrity, and there have never been more ways for ordinary folk to become famous—whether through reality TV or internet channels like You Tube or Twitter. Tech marketing guru David Weinberger has rephrased Warhol’s maxim for our world of social networking: “In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 people.” (Anderson n.p.)

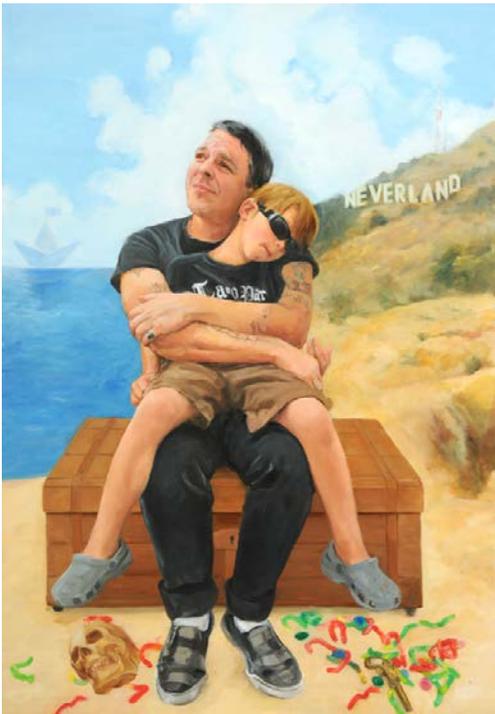


Fig. 11. Andrea Pavles, *Joey and Griffin*, 2010-2012, Oil on canvas, 31" x 44"

Referencing movies and movie posters in my work using regular folk is my acknowledgement of this new notion that “everyone will be famous for 15 people” (Anderson n.p.). Facebook and other social media make it possible to advertise one’s daily comings and goings to hundreds of “friends” or “fans” as often as one desires. In *Joey and Griffin*, as the “Neverland”/“Hollywood” sign on the hill in the background suggests, our current preoccupation with fame is very much at play. Hollywood itself seems to be a veritable

Neverland for adults. It can be frightening in its childishness—its celebration of self-indulgence, and its beautiful appearances. Joey and his son Griffin are planted on their butts on top of a toy treasure chest, and despite the 35 year age difference they have a frightening amount in common. The father-son man-boy team is a visual pun. Joey as depicted here, despite being a father, is in many ways a boy who never grew up himself, and Griffin's privy to a lot of age inappropriate things. I am ambivalent about whether this is good or bad or just an inevitable result of our status quo. Part of me respects the fact that, despite being a father, Joey has continued to maintain his own youthful exuberance and independence. Parenthood hasn't dramatically altered his personality in the same way it seems to affect the world-view of many of the women I know. When compared to motherhood, fatherhood is a different and for me enviable, animal. For this painting I referenced the movie posters of Drew Struzan—specifically his poster for *Hook and Muppets Treasure Island*. Like vampires, obviously pirates are big right now. Jack Sparrow is a great example of a modern take on an old character: he's a free-spirit who answers to no one and goes wherever the wind takes him.

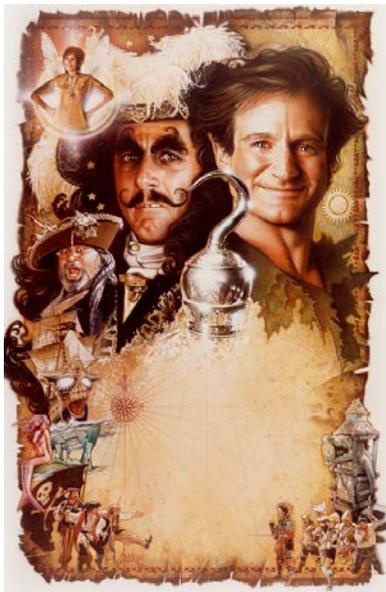


Fig. 12. Drew Struzan, Movie poster for *Hook*, 1991

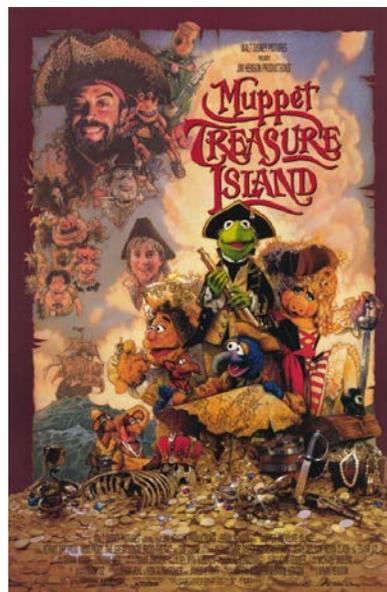


Fig. 13. Drew Struzan, Movie poster for *Muppet Treasure Island*, 1996

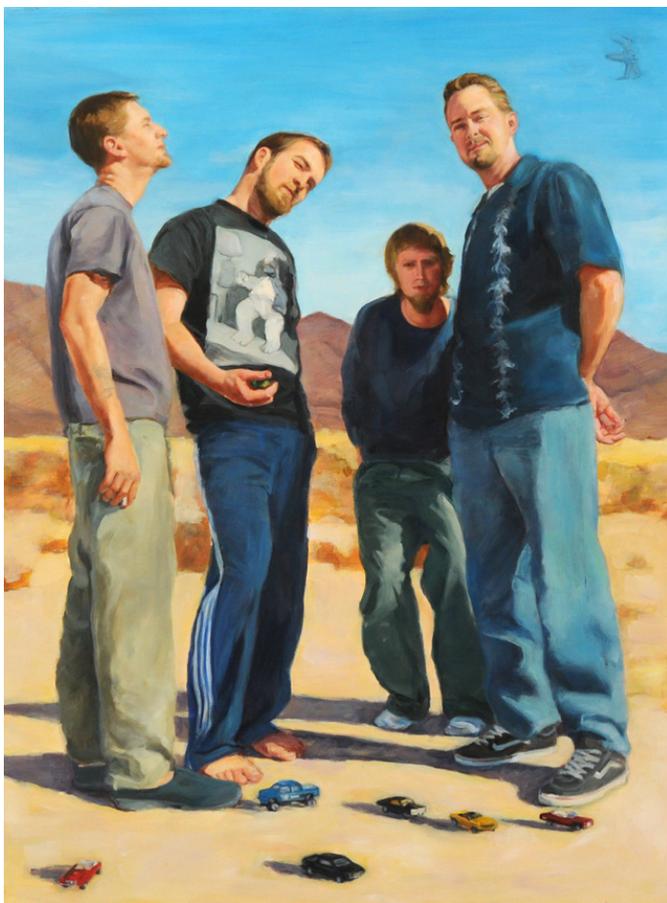


Fig. 14. Andrea Pavles, *The Fellas*, 2012, Oil on panel, 18" x 24"

Drew Struzan's movie posters for *Back to the Future 3* and *Star Wars* were also a source of inspiration for *The Fellas*. This painting depicts four of my friends and was taken at a time when they lived together in a small house in Vegas. All four of them basically grew up in Nevada and I've heard many stories about the time they spent out in the desert as kids throwing rocks at things or playing with toys. As young adults, I found that their free time, and mine too to

be sure, was still spent playing with toys—the specific toys, location, and games having changed slightly. The toy cars in the lower part of the picture refer to the idea that while toy cars function as playthings for children, real cars are status-rich toys for adult men. Here, the Vegas desert could just as easily be the surface of Tatooine, Luke Skywalker's home planet—hence the *Star Wars* spacecraft in the upper right hand corner of the sky. I have observed a phenomenon that occurs after long hours spent indoors playing video games in which, upon emerging from your house into the real world, you continue to respond to things you see as if you are still in the world of the game. Planes become fighter jets if you've been playing a *Star Wars* game and cop cars become something you feel the need to flee from after playing

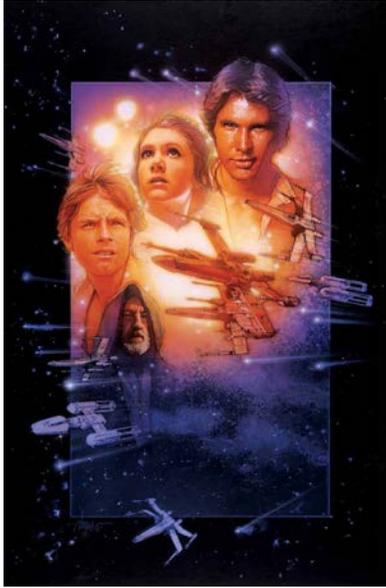


Fig. 15. Drew Struzan, Movie poster for *Star Wars Special Edition - A New Hope*, 1997



Fig. 16. Drew Struzan, Movie poster for *Back to the Future 3*, 1990

Grand Theft Auto. Movies like *Star Wars* and *Back to the Future* were touchstones of our childhoods and they have somehow managed to maintain their importance well into our adult lives, as has the *Simpsons*—Homer is sitting on a couch in his underwear on the shirt of the second guy from the left. The guy's poses are all fit for any movie poster even though, in reality, they're just standing around and aren't doing much of anything.



Fig. 17. John Brosio, *Fatigue*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 48" x 60"

A piece which refers both to Brown and Struzan Movie posters and current painting is *World's Largest Gift Store*. Because of the digital time stamp in the lower left corner of the piece, this painting acts as if it's a digital photograph, but it also could be a movie still in which a creature is attacking a city a la painter John Brosio's *Fatigue*.

Unlike the masses who run away screaming in Brown's posters, these male by-standers do exactly that: stand-by. Again, there are no damsels being rescued here, and for me the exact nature of the giant floating head is intentionally unclear. It



Fig. 18. Andrea Pavles, *World's Largest Gift Shop*, 2012 -?, Oil on panel, 18" x 24"

could just as easily be a large advertisement as a manifestation of the mental landscape of either of the guys in the foreground. Either way, they are not paying attention, and their apathy is understandable considering how much loud visual imagery competes for and deadens our ability to react in any sort of dramatic way to visual stimuli, especially in Vegas where the gift store in the painting is located.

The absence of any and all females in this body of work is possibly due to an over-reaction on my part in response to the facts that in the fine art world male subjects have historically been few and far between and my frustration with the questionably attractive categorizations of perpetual adolescent males seen in popular culture. As a heterosexual woman, I happen to like looking at men. The Guerilla Girls' famously advertised that 85% of the art in the Met is of the female nude and only 5% is created by female artists (Fineberg 477). Their absence also stems from the fact that serious relationships are something that

young adult males are increasingly opting to forego: “The median age at first marriage in the early 1970’s, when baby boomers were young, was 21 for women and 23 for men; by 2009 it had climbed to 26 for women and 28 for men, five years in little more than a generation” (Henig 30).

An article in *Art News* 2010, addresses the rarity of the male nude in art, author Lilly Wei suggests that perhaps women are reluctant to focus on men because of some inherent, aesthetic inferiority of the male form. She asks, “Does the mere fact of being depicted naked feminize the male body?” (83). I think that perhaps the idea that “men’s bodies are less esthetically pleasing” (Wei 83) is a bias that’s the consequence of a history rife with images depicting females created by males for a male audience. I know that I think about men and enjoy looking at them a lot. In discussing beauty in an interview on *Fresh Air*, Tom Ford addresses the lack of depictions of male beauty in popular culture.

We’re starting to objectify men a little bit more. And there is nothing wrong with that. Objectify maybe is the wrong word. Celebrate their bodies and use beautiful men... as a tool to get your attention and to sell things. But... we’re very, very uncomfortable in our culture with looking at a naked man. You know, naked women are everywhere, selling everything. And again, this is quite sexist. But naked men make us nervous.

(n.p.)

Perhaps the fact that men are the ones doing the marketing and being marketed to has something to do with this, and perhaps the recent shift relates to the fact that women are now the gender that marketing targets (Hymowitz 91). I’m all for celebrating the male body, and not necessarily the super sculpted, shiny, idealized male fashion model form of beauty that Ford discusses, but the more specific and individuated type of beauty I see in people I know.

Hence the lack of nudity in my work, the male body is not central to what makes a man attractive for me. In both *Mike G. Getting Two Tacos* and *Cupcake Dave* I paint my men as “dishes.” Language is a key part of what these paintings are illustrating. Many of the metaphors we use for attractive men and women alike are food related: an attractive man can be a “beefcake,” a woman—a “cheesecake,” and in the case of these paintings I was thinking of the metaphors “he’s a dish” or a



Fig. 19. Andrea Pavles, *Mike G. Getting Two Tacos*, 2012, Oil on panel, 16" x 20"

“complete package.” In *Mike G. Getting Two Tacos* and *Cupcake Dave*, as in real life, the exact definition of what makes one a complete package is confusing. This confusion is fitting in a world where highly processed snack foods function as sustenance far too often for me and many single young adult males I know (full disclosure: I saw Mike eating multiple Lunchables in a single sitting one time-- a packaged food item that I thought only kids would bother with). A cupcake is a more apt metaphor for the boy-man in my view than “beefcake,” and most people I know don’t care to cultivate the beefcake look. This particular friend, Dave, who hails from Connecticut, is in good shape, but his abs pale in comparison to his Italian-American contemporaries from MTV’s *Jersey Shore*--men whose bravado served as inspiration both for the pose and the imaginary Reality TV Show that this painting advertises.

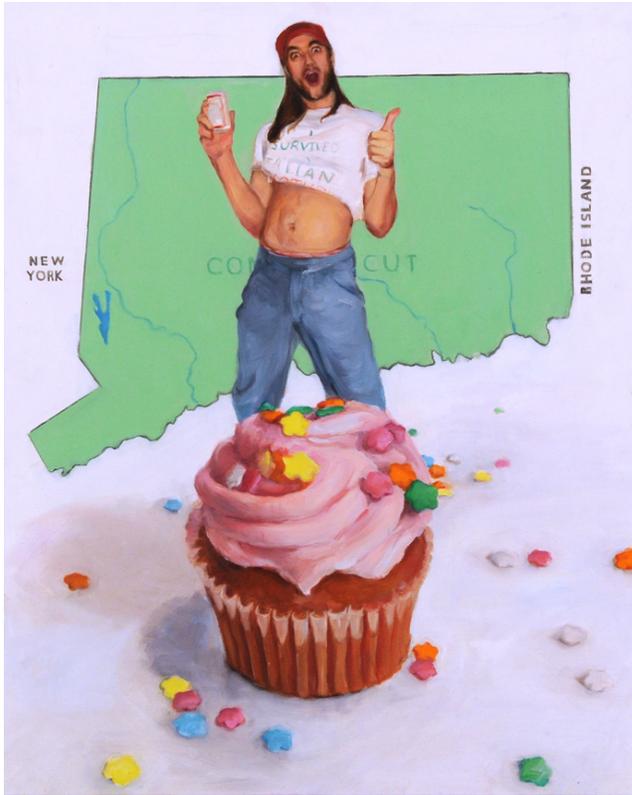


Fig. 20. Andrea Pavles, *Cupcake Dave*, 2011, Oil on panel, 16" x 20"

The *Jersey Shore* boys are certainly not my idea of attractive modern men, and I wonder if part of the reason we don't depict men as sex objects more often owes something to the ambivalence about who they are or should be, and how to define male attractiveness in the first place. There is also something girlish and vulnerable about the man-boy—although I realize that saying that vulnerability is feminine is a telling example of loaded gender language. Kay Hymowitz addresses

some of the ways in which qualities that were once considered attractive in men are now suspect, "Today...with women moving ahead in an advanced economy, provider husbands and fathers are now optional, and the character qualities men had needed to play their role—*fortitude, stoicism, courage, fidelity are obsolete and even a little embarrassing*" (italics added Hymowitz 16).

Obviously what's considered attractive in a man is nuanced, varies from person to person. It is too simple to say that a man's attractive because he's one of the aforementioned Jersey Shore beefcakes. In all my work, I look at these men with love and for me, what I love is often what's funny. What fascinates me about the gender roles we all live with is how they often seem like a questionable fit. In art and in life, many times societal expectations strike

me as frustrating and amusing. In the same way that it's hard to find many male subjects in paintings, it's also hard to find a lot of humor or at least humor that's not considered "campy." I feel strongly that something doesn't have to be serious to have something serious to say, much in the same way you don't need six-pack abs to be handsome. In her essay "Notes on Camp" Susan Sontag defines camp, a word that stirs up a lot of contempt in the art world, as "the love of the exaggerated, the "off," of things-being-what-they-are-not" (279.). I've tried to address the perpetual male adolescent type in this work in a playful way. So much of what our culture expects from its adult men and women, seems to be something that people can either play into or rebel against. Sontag also writes that "Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not lamp, but "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre" (280). Sontag's notion of "life as theatre" (280) is what I've tried to use humor to draw attention to in all of this work.

RESEARCH

When it comes to what pieces of cultural detritus I pick and choose to mash up with my portraits—I tend to put together images that resonate together or off-set one another in ways that I find both humorous and occasionally unsettling. At LCAD, I've been pressed a great deal as to where this impetus comes from, and I think, as I've alluded to before, I'm attracted to the proliferation of images and text we're constantly bombarded with as a result of the omni-presence of advertising. After all, "The Post-Modern Age is a time of incessant choosing. It's an era when no orthodoxy can be adopted without self-consciousness and irony, because all traditions seem to have some validity. This is partly a consequence of what is called the information explosion" (Jencks 7).

I realize that growing up watching MTV has helped to shape my “pluralistic” (Jencks 7) visual vocabulary. I’m also influenced by music that relies on “sampling” and mash-ups of pre-existing songs. Granted there is a lot of music that recycles older songs due to a lack of originality, but when done right, sampling can be playful and wonderful. In particular, I’m thinking of the early 90s hip hop of *De La Soul*, *The Pharcyde*, *The Roots*, and *the Fugees* and more recently the work of *Girl Talk*.

There is a kind of play that happens when things are rejiggered that I’m drawn to and I’ve tried to reflect this sensibility in my paintings. I looked to artists who make use of non-literal spaces. I drew heavily from illustration and illustration from the 1950s in particular because of the way the artists would emphasize their figures and simplify the backgrounds—often eliminating backgrounds all-together and off-setting their figures with flat color for clarity. I also enjoy the way that text in illustration compliments the images. The work of Reynold Brown, Norman Rockwell, Norman Saunders, Andrew Loomis, and old Men’s Magazines was particularly helpful (Fig. 22). In terms of contemporary painters who seem to use some of the same illustrator tools in creating non-literal environments, I found the work of Alex Gross to be instructive.

Gross' mash-ups of landscapes with floating elements, and his inclusion of pop cultural references were influential. Similarly, I looked to the use of compositional devices such as the combination of realism and more abstract designs in the work of Alfonse Mucha (Fig. 25) and Jeffrey Hein.



Fig. 21. Alex Gross, *Premonition*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 48" x 53.5"

I also love any and all movies, good and bad; I think some of the films

of Pixar are the most moving works of art I've seen anywhere. Again, just because something appeals to the masses (I can't help but think of Madame Tussauds) or is humorous, doesn't mean it communicates nothing of value. When it comes to fine art that successfully embraces humor, I was influenced by Kurt Kauper's painting of nude males (Fig. 23). Mark Ryden (Fig. 24) and Ron English are also masters of beautiful, creepy, funny work.

In terms of technique, I look to, or up to, the likes of Velazquez, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Caravaggio, and Sargent, and more modern painters like Norman Rockwell, Jonathan Wateridge, Natalia Fabia and Shawn Barber. I also was drawn to the couple of realism and fantasy employed by Michael Hussar, Ron English, Mark Ryden, James Gurney, Nathan Fowkes, and John Brosio.

METHODOLOGY

The ideas for my paintings are always generated by the people and conversations I see taking place around me. There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to what strikes my fancy; it's a love-at-first-sight process. When there is someone I'm interested in painting, I'll organize a shoot with him in which I provide props, costumes, a specific time, location, give him general directions as to what I want the painting to look like, and let him cut loose. I often respond to pictures in which he may improvise something that is revealing or evocative.

The physical production of the paintings has been at times pleasurable, and at others a Sisyphean undertaking. Having focused on drawing as an undergraduate, painting at LCAD has been like a trial by fire, and I've had to learn as I go--making a good deal of mistakes and doing a lot of backtracking. Although, the road has gotten considerably smoother as I've progressed, I feel like, in making each painting, I still manage to fail remarkably in new ways. What I tell myself I should do, and what I end up actually doing, are two completely separate things.

In an ideal world, I would start out by meticulously planning a piece down to the last fraction of a millimeter. In reality--generally, after I've sketched out an idea, I try to take stellar reference photos--ideally hundreds at a time so that I'll be able to choose from a wide variety of gestures and facial expressions, and plenty of in focus, clear, images that haven't been cropped in weird ways. Norman Rockwell's process, as described in *Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera*, seems to me to represent the apotheosis of methodical planning for photographing material. Rockwell would photograph exactly what he needed for a piece down to the most minute detail or prop, only after doing extensive sketching.

Whether I have planned out a shoot with a model meticulously, or managed to secure a great reference shot through a happy accident, I do thumbnail sketches to start putting together an interesting composition. After that, I always make multiple photocopies of my images per John Brosio's suggestion. Using multiple copies of my photos frees me up to abuse and manipulate them in all sorts of ways without getting too precious about things. I also enjoy the physical quality of actually cutting, pasting, enlarging, and shrinking things myself in the real world as opposed to using Photoshop, because cutting and pasting lends itself well to the kind of collaged look I want my paintings to have. I want them to feel like a fake or low-budget movie poster as opposed to a real or highly polished one--or at, least some weird hybrid of the two.

I try to be as precise as possible about where everything sits at this stage. And when I'm happy that every piece of the thing is where it needs to be and that I don't need to edit or alter any of the information, and that the thing is striking just the right chord, I'll do a scaled down drawing of the piece (again, a la Rockwell) in black and white, to edit what's in the reference photos further, and to alter things that may look one way in the photo reference but would look better altered for the final painting. This drawing also helps to work out the overall values of the piece. When I'm happy with the look of things, I'll then take the scaled down drawing or parts of the photo-copy mock-up, and either create a grid to help transfer the image via drawing to painting surface, or project the image, depending on the scale of the piece and type of surface I'm working on. I'm still experimenting with all sorts of surfaces: I've worked with wet-sanded Gesso on canvas which I have occasionally stretched over board, primed birch, and oil-primed linen.

I've found making photocopies of the preliminary photos that are enlarged to the size of the actual piece has been incredibly helpful not only in helping me see a basic black and white value structure, but also making sure the image is the right scale as I paint it. This also allows me to use a technique similar to what the Tussuads sculptors do during a sitting with a celebrity. They use calipers to take hundreds of measurements--recording the distance from the top of the head to the chin etc. Working from a reference that is the proper size in two-dimensions, makes it easy to duplicate this Tussuads process with a ruler. I'll use a colored pastel pencil that corresponds to the color I want to use for under painting. Then I'll either put down a grisaille layer or color block-in layer (*Imaginative Realism* 190) that corresponds with the color I want the final painting to have. I've found that incorporating the palette I was taught to use at Tussuads lends itself well to creating flesh tones on a canvas. The progression closely follows either James Gurney's process as he's lays out in *Color and Light* and *Imaginative Realism* or the steps in *How to Paint Like the Old Masters* depending on the piece.

There has also been a surprising philosophical and psychological side to learning how to paint for me. Planning ahead, organizing my time, knowing when to let well enough alone, trying to see the forest through the trees and avoid getting stuck focusing on small details, trying to get enough sleep and eat well etc., is of the utmost importance when it comes to regularly producing paintings, and I've got a long way to go in terms of internalizing these lessons. Also, knowing when to listen to people's suggestions and when to block them out, trying not to worry about money, and whether or not anyone will ever relate to my very personal statements enough to ever want to buy my work is an ongoing struggle.

CONCLUSION

Because my work plays upon the differences and similarities between the tradition of portraiture in fine art, personal photography, and advertising, I also hope it calls attention to the fine line that exists between these different genres and what distinguishes one from the other. I don't think that we can dismiss the images of the figure as they exist in contemporary advertising and popular culture as being purely decorative and therefore somehow less important than the images of the figure in 'fine art.' I think that Charles Baudelaire's discussion of beauty in *The Painter of Modern Life* also draws attention to the difficulty with these categorizations of commercial and fine art because for Baudelaire, what is fashionable and contemporary (and, as a result, marketable) is an essential element of beauty. He writes, "Beauty is always and inevitably of a double composition... made up of an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if ... whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions" (3).

Creating this work at LCAD has represented a leap for me in terms of my own personal narrative. I was scared that, once at school, I would miss my job and discover that making paintings at this point in my life wasn't what I thought it would be. I'm thrilled and scared shitless to say that I love painting and I hope that I can balance it with my work-life. Being able to tell the stories that I want to tell visually has been incredibly freeing and addictive. However, I'm not sure what story I should be telling myself about what I've done. On the one hand, I think education is a key part of a meaningful life. On the other hand, I worry that going back to school to try to be a "real" artist may be symptomatic of my own prolonged adolescence and that I, like the guys I've painted, am merely a typical example of

what Kay Hymowitz calls, "The quarter lifer ... the alienated youth dreaming of personal authenticity and "passion" in a world that threatens Dilbert-style misery for those unable to navigate the possibilities of the knowledge economy" (43).

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APPENDIX A



Fig.2. Andrea Pavles, *Kevin, Mike, and Stevie*, 2012, Oil on panel, 16"x 20"



Fig. 3. Andrea Pavles, *What the What?*, 2010-2012, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48"

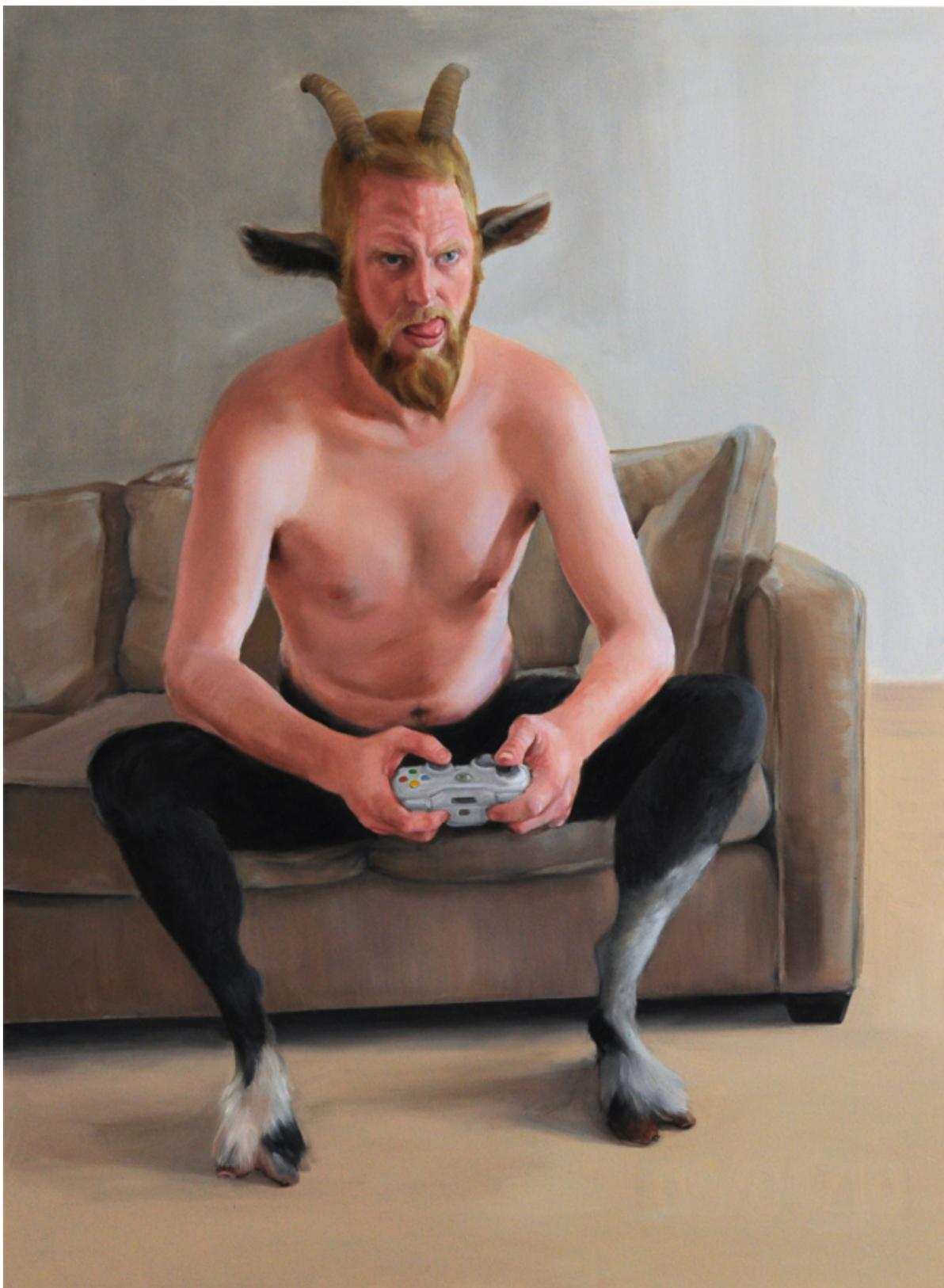


Fig. 7. Andrea Pavles, *Satyr Gamer*, 2010-2012, Oil on linen, 30" x 40

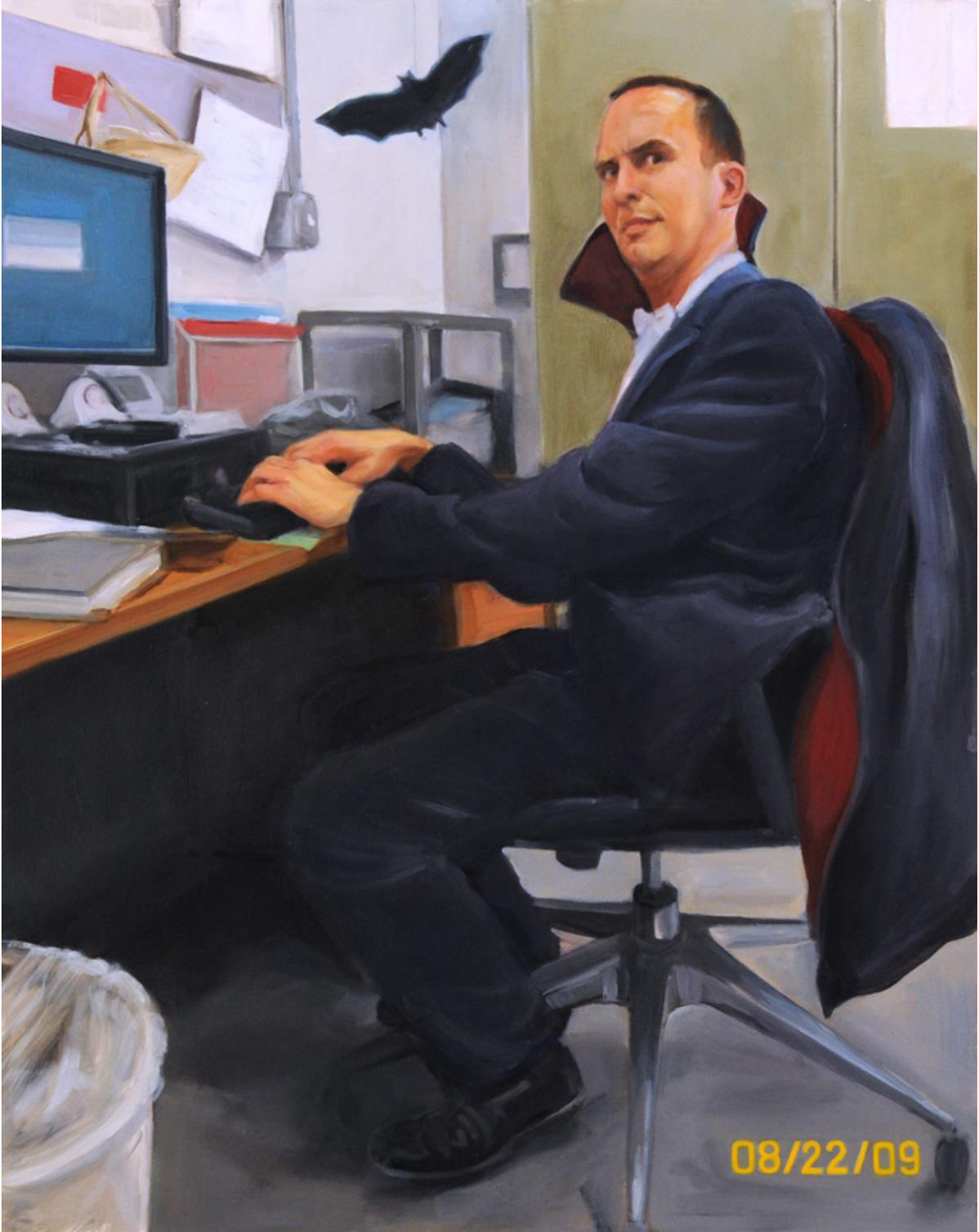


Fig. 9. Andrea Pavles, *DracuNeil*, 2011, Oil on panel, 16" x 20"



Fig. 11. Andrea Pavles, *Joey and Griffin*, 2010-2012, Oil on canvas, 31" x 44"



Fig. 14. Andrea Pavles, *The Fellas*, 2012, Oil on panel, 18" x 24"



Fig. 18. Andrea Pavles, World's Largest Gift Shop, 2012 -?, Oil on panel, 18" x 24"



Fig. 19. Andrea Pavles, *Mike G. Getting Two Tacos*, 2012, Oil on panel, 16" x 20"

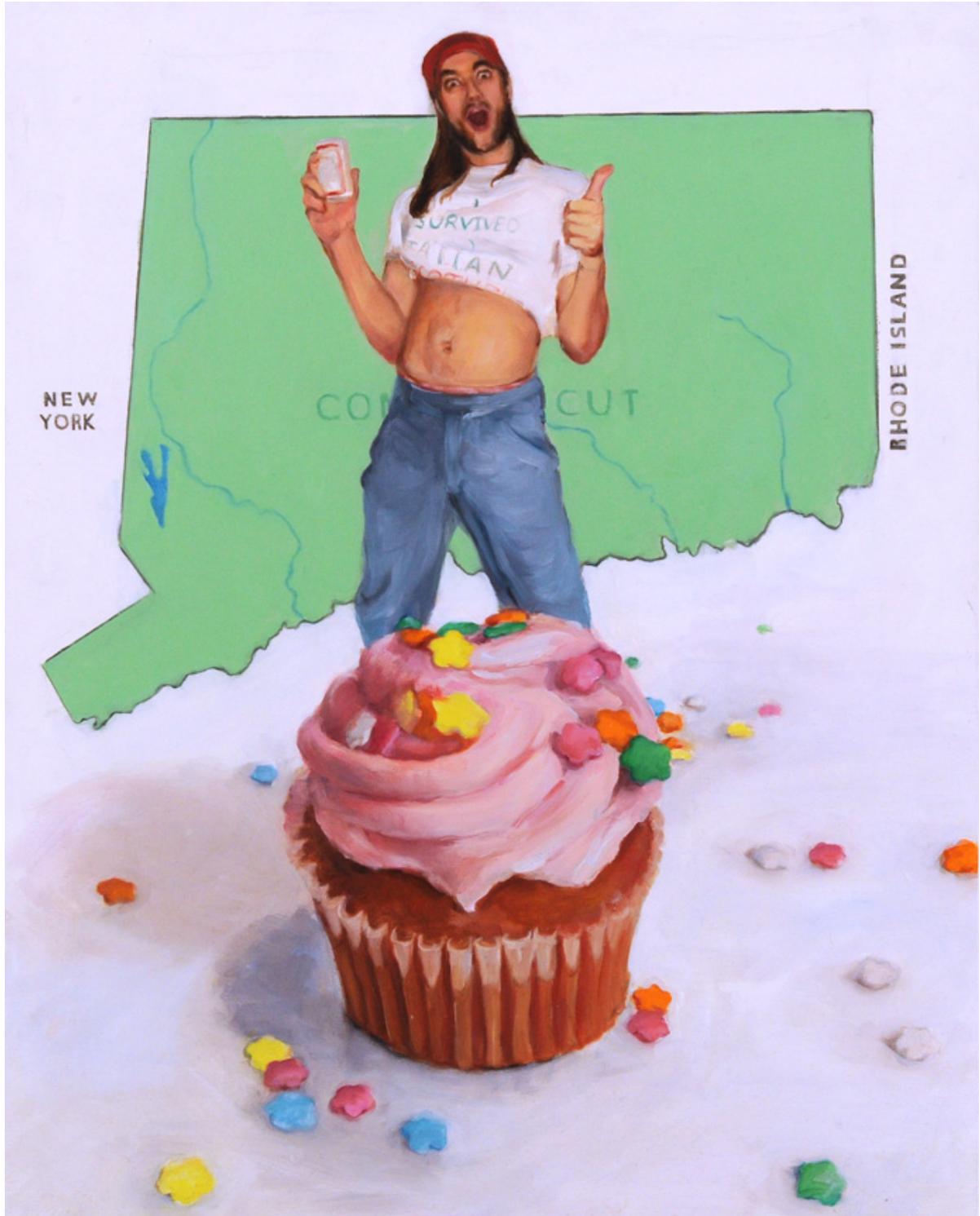


Fig. 20. Andrea Pavles, *Cupcake Dave*, 2011, Oil on panel, 16" x 20"

APPENDIX B



Fig. 1. Madame Tussauds, *Jack Sparrow*, 2008, multimedia, life-sized



Fig. 4 Benjamin Darling, *Tips for Teens*, "The Social Climb," 44

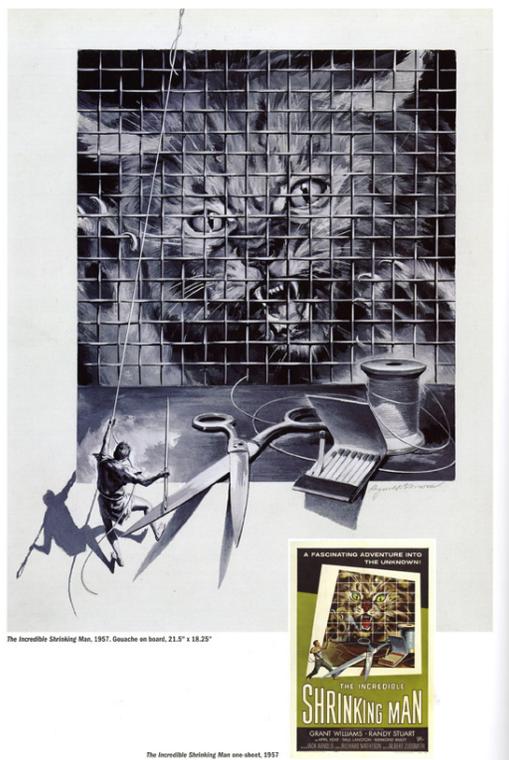


Fig. 5 Reynold Brown, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, 1957, Gouache on board, 21.5" x 18.25"



Fig 6 Reynold Brown, *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, 1957

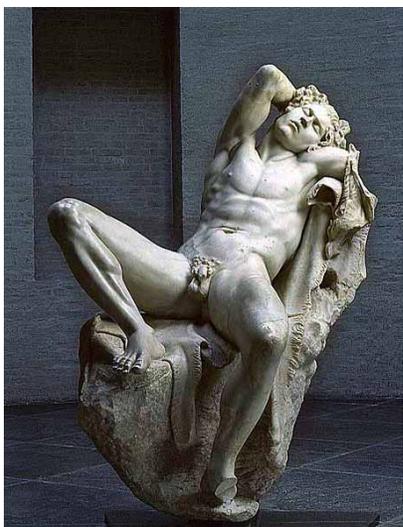


Fig. 8. Unknown Artist, *Barberini Faun*, c. 220 BC., Marble, The Glyptothek, Munich



Fig. 10. James Bama, Aurora box cover art for *Dracula*, 1962



Fig. 12. Drew Struzan, Movie poster for *Hook*, 1991

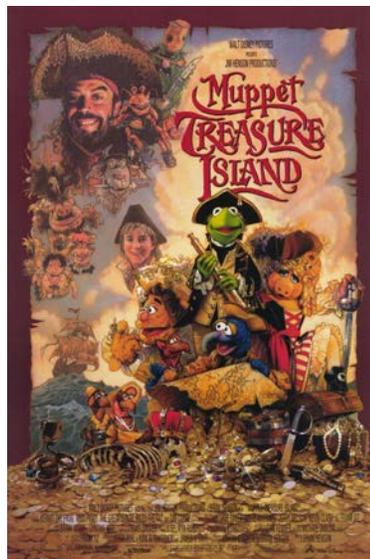


Fig. 13. Drew Struzan, Movie poster for *Muppet Treasure Island*, 1996

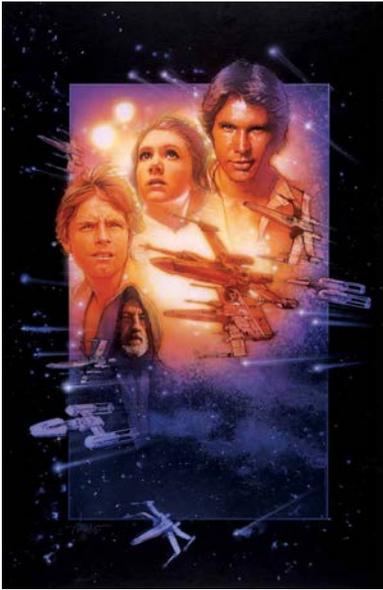


Fig. 15. Drew Struzan, Movie poster for *Star Wars Special Edition - A New Hope*, 1997

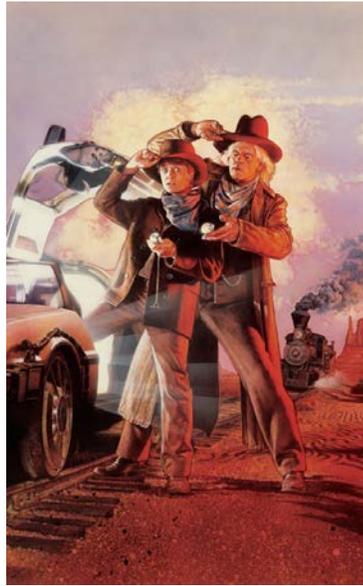


Fig. 16. Drew Struzan, Movie poster for *Back to the Future 3*, 1990



Fig. 17. John Brosio, *Fatigue*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 48" x 60"



Fig. 21. Alex Gross, *Premonition*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 48" x 53.5"

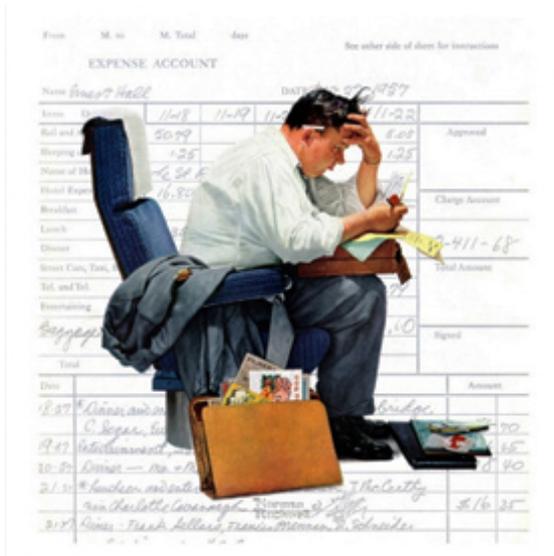


Fig. 22. Norman Rockwell, *Expenses*, 1957

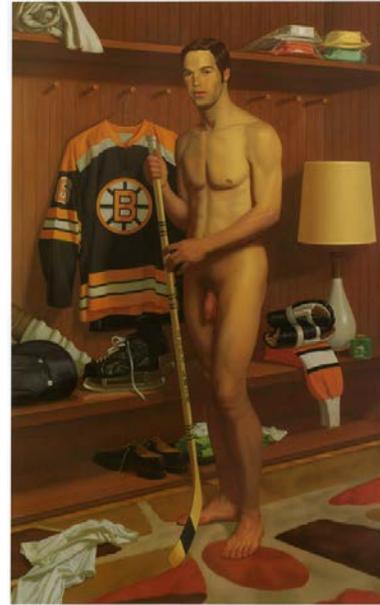


Fig. 23. Kurt Kauper, *Derek*, 2005,
Oil on birch plywood, 93" x 58.5"



Fig. 24. Mark Ryden, *Grotto of the Old Mass*, 2008,
Oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

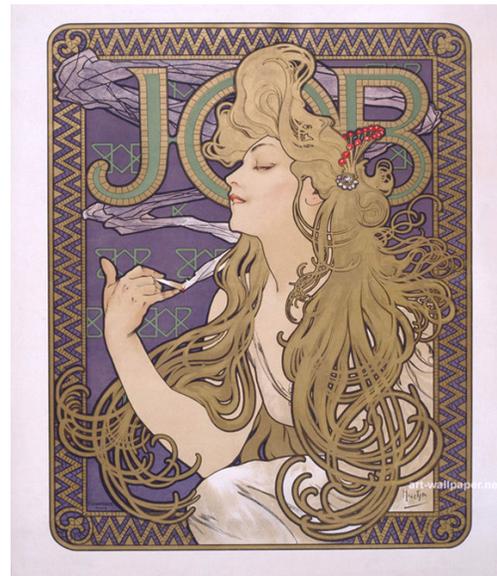


Fig. 25. Alphonse Mucha, *Job*, 1896