

COMMON SENSE



COMMON SENSE

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by

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ABSTRACT

Our ethics, logic, and aesthetics are highly dependent on the environment to which we belong. In one community such as a country, family, ethnicity, or generation, people may hold beliefs that feel like “common sense” to the people who belong, but those same beliefs often seem odd to people from another community. I want people to become aware of the “common sense” that subconsciously controls them. Our beliefs and feelings are so embedded in our lives that people are not even aware of their oddness. Through my conceptual oil paintings, I try to reveal that people’s destiny is controlled by these socially imposed values without question. I want those who suffer from their fate, which is not their choice, to have the power to overcome their born environment on their own. I hope they can believe in themselves, even if their beliefs and value systems differ from those in their inner circle.

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I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Peter Zokosky and Sharon Flanders for their unwavering support and loving encouragement of all students, including me.

Lastly, I want to thank myself for not giving up on my dream.

DEDICATION

To all those around the world who are at the mercy of their fate.

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COMMON SENSE

DESCRIPTION

Our ethics, logic, and aesthetics are highly dependent on the environment to which we belong. In one community such as a country, family, ethnicity, or generation, people may hold beliefs that feel like “common sense” to the people who belong, but those same beliefs often seem odd to people from another community. I want people to become aware of the “common sense” that subconsciously controls them. Our beliefs and feelings are so embedded in our lives that people are not even aware of their oddness. Through my paintings, I try to reveal that, without question, people’s destiny is controlled by socially imposed values. I want those who suffer from their fate, which is not their choice, to have the power to overcome their born environment on their own. I hope they can believe in themselves even if their beliefs and value systems differ from those in their inner circle.

I began thinking about this theme because I have experienced many clashes between the beliefs held by a crowd and my own. My mother, a former art teacher, used to say to me, “You have no talent for drawing humans,” and “You are not clever.” Because of these comments, I stopped drawing humans and studying. My parents controlled all facets of my career path. I would ask my teachers about the significance of the school rules, and they just answered, “Follow the rules, because they are the rules.” Adults always provided me with what they believed was the “right way” rather than asking me what I wanted to do. At the time, I had never made any decisions on my own, and I believed that our talents and potential were determined from birth and that we could not escape our destiny.

My views changed when I moved to Australia right after graduating from college to escape being controlled by others. That was my first time breaking the path that adults had

set for me. However, because this was soon after my father died of cancer, and because many major companies rarely hire non-new graduates in Japan, my family was angry with me for leaving. My mother was furious, and my sister has never spoken to me again. Since I had never been out of my hometown before, my life in Australia was the most hopelessly lonely I had ever experienced in my life. I had no money, no English, no friends, no career, no smartphone, and no place to belong. I worked washing cars with Afghan men. They were exiles from war-torn Afghanistan, unable to return to their home country. Besides the low wages, the work was so hard that I lost my grip on my fork at dinner. Also, I shared a small and dirty apartment with youth from developing countries. The environment was so unsanitary that we had to dine watching swarms of cockroaches on the table. I was shocked to learn that the environment in which they were born almost entirely determined their lives. However, they used to tell me, “When someone asks you if you can do something, never say no. Even if you think that you can’t do it, try to make it possible.” They taught me to stay strong despite the environment.

My way of life, which has been different from others in timing and manner of studying and working, and traveling across foreign countries, has been met with antipathy. People have told me it is too late or impossible whenever I try something. No one ever said, “You will be able to do it.” What I could do then was not to try to convince them with words, but to work hard on my own every minute, of every hour, of every day, for years. Thus, I have achieved my dreams on my own. Therefore, I am determined to believe in myself, even if no one shares my beliefs. Now I am in art school in the US, painting mainly figures—a subject my mother told me I had no talent to paint.

Why do so many people in a community think that only one way is the right way when there are many paths to reach an answer, as in mathematics? Why do so many people say that the majority opinion is “right”? As I grew older, I realized that it was not their choice. As I traveled between foreign countries, I saw that people from various backgrounds were greatly influenced by the environment they were born into. This kind of crowd

mentality exists in every community around the world. Many people assume that the common sense of the environment in which they were born is all there is in the world, and they live only within that environment. This is not a personal issue; these prejudices are prevalent in each society. As remote work and cashless payments have become normal, and as people have embraced homosexuality and racial diversity, changes in our ideology have revolutionized many societies. Questioning our common

sense is the first step in changing society. For this project, I have 15 oil paintings on canvas. Each painting has a different message related to how people’s subconscious dynamics shape society. I aim to question these dynamics through the paintings and allow people to reflect on their own fate.

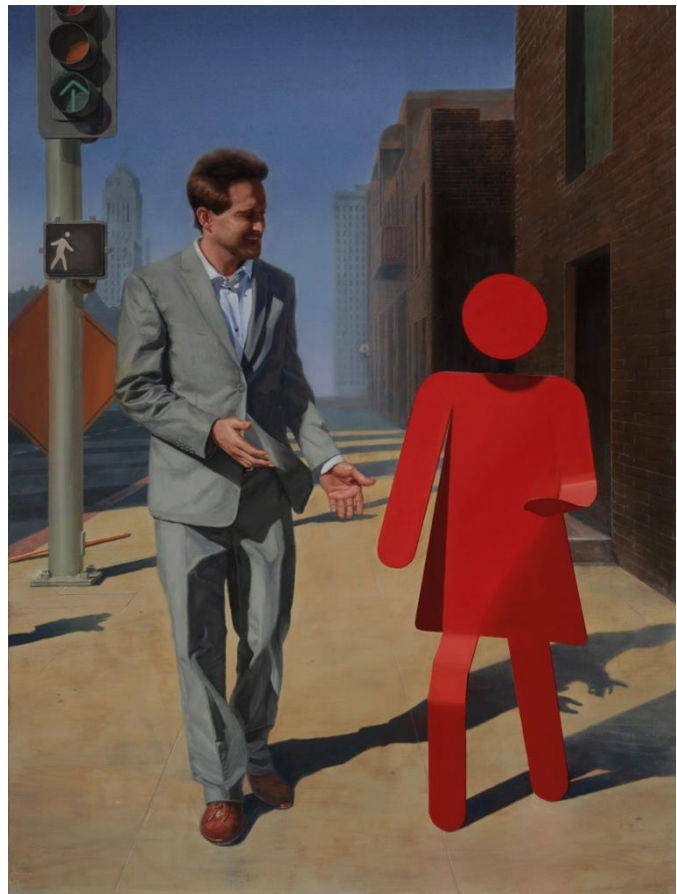


Fig. 1. Sumire Kudo, *Female*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 36” x 48”.

One painting in the series, *Female* (Fig. 1), is about female objectification. A man and woman are happily conversing, but the woman is a symbol for a human as depicted on a bathroom sign.. The message of this painting is that if someone judges a person by his or her gender, it is the same as talking to a restroom sign. Some men ignore a woman's personality and ability, while only focusing on a symbol lacking individuality of a woman. In this painting, we can only know from her shape that she is female, without knowing any of her personal characteristics. The woman and man appear to be happily conversing with each other because they do

not realize that this unequal value system is dehumanizing. This kind of objectification doesn't just happen to women but also to men. Through this painting, I hope to convey to people that gender

discrimination resides in our subconscious.

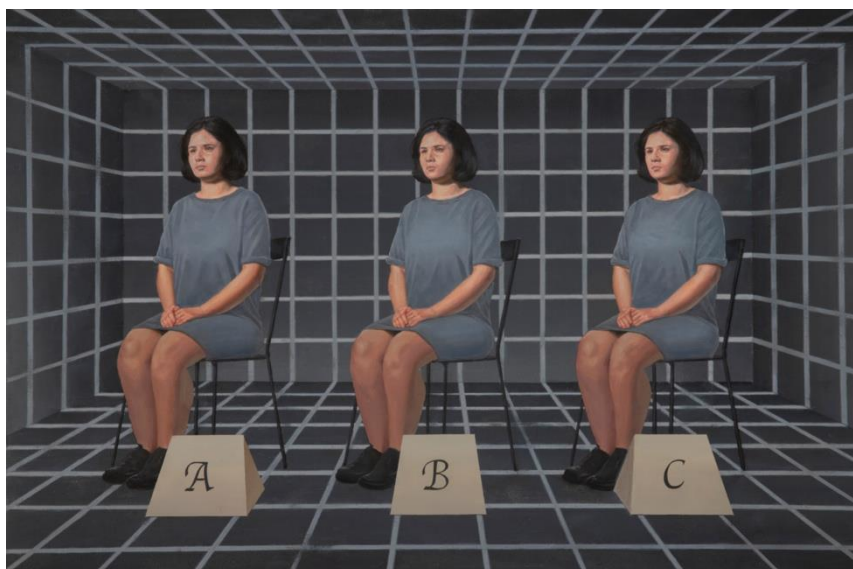


Fig. 2. Sumire Kudo, *Selection*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36".

Another in the series, *Selection* (Fig. 2) is about stereotypes related to appearance. There are three of the same woman. When viewers see the A, B, and C choices, they realize they have to choose one of them. Through the painting, I want to ask people: when you judge a person, what other information do you consider besides appearance?



Fig. 3. Sumire Kudo, *What You See*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 11" x 14".

In *What You See* (Fig. 3), a woman stands with a religious gesture while looking through Virtual Reality (VR) glasses. I want to convey that what we see is limited. People rely too much on media such as television and social network filters to receive information, and many of them have come to believe that information from those sources is all that is there without realizing it.

Toys (Fig. 4) and *Adult* (Fig. 5) are about labor. I believe it is time to review our work culture. People assume that it is normal to spend many years in school to get the ideal job and subsequently work five days a week. It feels like it is their fate to be born to work. However, is it best to have all of humanity devote most of our lives to work? Especially in an age of rapid technological development, I believe we have enough systems in place to manage our basic life needs with minimal human labor. Yet people continue to force art and industry to find monetary value and spawn new businesses. I look forward to a future where humans don't need to work and are able to participate more fully in cultural activities, communication, and developmental research for non-monetary purposes.

In *Toys*, employees play with graphs and charts like children in an office. They wear suits and baby accessories like a pacifier and a ribbon. I find myself questioning the true value of our corporate work. I feel that it is like simply grabbing what is in front of us



Fig. 4. Sumire Kudo, *Toys*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 30" x 40".

without question like children playing with toys. The employees in this painting are wearing big smiles on their faces because they believe that they are happy and are doing something valuable. Since I

alternately live in Japan and America, I have to check the graph of exchange rates every day. In this number-crunching process, I do not see any real productivity. It does not improve anyone's skill or create anything new. It is just money as an abstract number, moving from one person to another day by day.

In *Adult*, a cartoon character interacts with a drunken businessman. The inspiration for this came from the fact that many laborers in Japan commit suicide due to overwork. The businessman wears a suit and a ring, symbolizing the many



Fig. 5. Sumire Kudo, *Adult*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 24" x 30".



Fig. 6. Sumire Kudo, *Imprinting*, 2023, Oil on board, 8" x 10".

Imprinting (Fig. 6) and *Products* (Fig. 7) are about monetary value. In *Imprinting*, the baby ducks are following their mother, but the mother duck is a bill. Ducklings have a behaviour called imprinting, believing the first thing they see is their parent. The value of money is “imprinted” similarly on humans. In fact, money has no substance, and its value is maintained only by common conception.

Financial education and monetary value are introduced early in life, but I believe that our perception of financial worth should be thrown out and replaced with the objective question: what exactly is money? In *Products*, a man appears almost consumed by a group of boxes with barcodes. He is trying to put on the box with the barcode like an article of clothing or an appendage, as if it were natural for him to



Fig. 7. Sumire Kudo, *Products*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 22" x 28".

responsibilities that fall upon him. The cartoon character symbolizes the purity we had as children. By seeing the contrast between the two characters, I want the viewer to feel that people have lost the purity they had as children in their daily labor.



Fig. 8. Sumire Kudo, *Eat or Eaten*, 2023, Oil on board, 12'' x 16''.

become one of them. In a capitalist society, what people call “valuable” often means that it has monetary value. Human performance and what they produce is usually valued only in terms of how many things they can make. Within this framework of valuation, a

human is treated as a product whose skills and time can be bought and sold.

Eat or Eaten (Fig. 8), and *Reputation* (Fig. 9) are about death in modern society. The world was forced to go into lockdown when the Covid virus hit in 2020. Covid would spread without the lockdown, and more people would die. But with the lockdowns, the economy came to a screeching halt, and more people committed suicide. The situation was difficult; either policy resulted in death in some cases. That news had me reflecting on the fact that in human society, financial destitution often leads directly to physical death.

In Eat or Eaten, one businessman holds another businessman in his mouth like a wild lion, but even that predator is in the sight of someone else’s gun. The person looking at this



Fig. 9. Sumire Kudo, *Reputation*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 16'' x 20''.

painting is also both predator and prey. If losing one's job is comparable to losing one's physical life, then in today's society, money coming and going is comparable to the predator-prey dynamics in nature. As I work, I take someone else's money, and as I consume, someone else takes mine. However, it's important to remember that while we may face financial challenges, as long as we are alive, there is always hope for survival.

Social death is not solely an economic problem. The public is overly concerned with the reputation of others. In *Reputation*, one man imitates holding a gun, but a star of a review is shooting from his hand to wound the other man. People's self-esteem occasionally is damaged because of others' opinions. People are often quiet because speaking out against the majority or those in power may be met with significant criticism. We are constantly threatened by our reputations.

Law (Fig. 10) depicts a world where candy, a favorite food of children, has become illegal. In the courtroom, the detective shows the little girl's candy as evidence, as if it were illegal. The jurors are looking at it in surprise as if it were something dangerous. That little girl is being treated like a criminal just for eating her favorite candy. This story is a metaphor for the fact that there are some things that are not actually harmful that are sometimes not allowed under the law. Laws that are normal for one country might seem strange in other countries due to their cultural and social differences. For example, as Enze Han and Joseph O'Mahoney note in



Fig. 10. Sumire Kudo, *Law*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48".

their paper, “From Death Penalty to Legal Marriage: LGBT Politics in a Global Perspective,” “there are still many countries where homosexual conduct is criminalized with different levels of penal punishment, including the death penalty” (2). By contrast, in the United States, homosexuality is celebrated with Gay Pride parades. In addition, in a published report, “The Death Penalty for Drug Offences Global Overview,” Patrick Gallahue and Rick Lines explain that the laws of Vietnam, the Republic of Indonesia, and Laos impose heavy



Fig. 11. Sumire Kudo, *Majority*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 22” x 28”.

penalties, including the death penalty, for the production and sale of marijuana (25, 31, 38).

However, in California where I currently reside, marijuana is legal.

In *Majority* (Fig. 11), a lone red woman is surrounded by a lone red woman is surrounded by a group of mass produced green geometric shapes. This painting shows that differences can make people feel inferior and alone. All people have their own attributes, like faith, preference, nationality, gender, and more. The woman is

unclothed to represent that humans are simply

some sort of biological organism and that attributes are merely concepts or systems created by human society. If someone holds a minority attribute in the community to which the person belongs, the person tends to have a negative impression of it, yet people holding that attribute are not actually inferior to the majority.

Foreigners (Fig. 12) is about the visa system that permits “foreigners” to travel to a



Fig. 12. Sumire Kudo, *Foreigners*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 12” x 16”.

country. There is a line for a visa check on the moon. Why do people not question the restrictions placed on our dwellings and industries by nationalities, even though people have now begun to realize that it is immoral to make judgments hinging on intrinsic factors such as gender and race? Nationality is not a personal choice. In the past, there was a time when no one pointed out that some races were segregated, treated inhumanely, and forced to have separate schools, washrooms, and water fountains. In the same way, future generations might be surprised to learn

from their history books that “foreigners” needed visas to stay in a place in the olden days. We are all foreigners.

Addiction (Fig. 13) is about the value of things. A small capsule rests on a fine china plate with a disproportionately fancy table setting. Through the painting, I ask people: is it really worth what you think it is worth? The phrase “happily ever after” in *Happiness* (Fig. 14) is often seen at the end of fairy tale. Many people may think that success in business and earning wealth or fame and attention from many people is the definition of happiness.



Fig. 13. Sumire Kudo, *Addiction*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 14” x 18”.

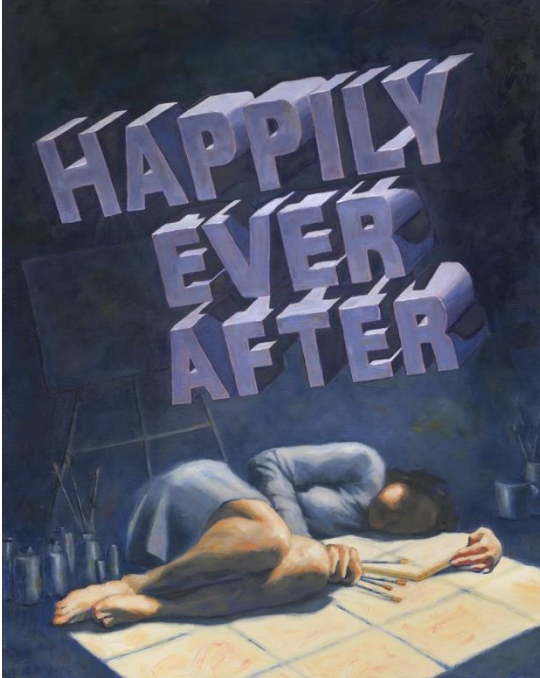


Fig. 14. Sumire Kudo, *Happiness*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 24" x 30".

However, it is important to remember that the definition of happiness differs from person to person. The heroine in this painting seems to be a painter, lying with a brush and canvas. Viewers cannot tell if she is smiling or sad faced. The light from the window illuminates her, creating the impression that she is in a jail cell. The strange, oppressive typography floating above her looks like a commercial font for a poster. Is the heroine feeling positively or negatively about her life?

In *Peace* (Fig. 15), a family is happily having dinner, but the windows are crudely blocked with wood. This painting shows that people keep the peace by staying blind to reality. People tend to feel indifferent to the situations of others. Individuals often think that it is someone else's problem after all and that they are fine as long as their own friends and family are safe. Ignorance contributes to this. Currently, I reside in a city in the US, and when I get on the bus at the crack of dawn, the seats are full of workers.



Fig. 15. Sumire Kudo, *Peace*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 24" x 30".

There was a man at a bus stop at Christmas lamenting about not seeing his family back home, and a family carrying grocery bags looked at him as if he were a creep. On the buses, some people scream, some spit, and some ask for money. The wealthy gather with the wealthy, and the educated gather with the educated. The wealthy who study hard to improve society are assumed “privileged” and indolent by some of the impoverished. Ironically, the blue-collar laborers, some of whom work hard, are assumed to be vagrant and criminally complacent by a few of the affluent. Both social classes have preconceived notions of the other, subsequently avoiding each other without further discussion. It does not matter whether the people who see this painting belong to those outside the room or those inside the room. The problem is that people often miss the opportunity to be involved with different kinds of people and are almost always with their own kind. So, they have no idea or interest in what is going on outside their own community. As in this painting, they are separated by a wall.

The figures in my paintings do not refer to anyone in particular. Nor do my paintings point to a specific place or community, since I want all viewers to project themselves onto the subject. My paintings are designed to raise questions about the existing values and beliefs of every viewer regardless their position. I do not intend to advocate for a unilateral ideology or belief system. The interpretation of my artwork is ultimately contingent on observers’ personal sense of justice and subjective understanding. Many businessmen appear in my paintings as figures dressed in suits because they represent a lack of personality or are icons being controlled by the social system. The figures often wear achromatic clothing to symbolize their lack of individuality. I paint with a traditional realistic painting technique because I believe it can effectively convey a message to the public. I want my paintings to be accessible to people who are not interested in art history and who would not read the

descriptions next to the paintings in galleries or museums. Therefore, I need to use figurative elements that make my paintings' meanings obvious to everyone.

Art is like my shadow for me, shaped like me, reflecting my darkest reasoning. My work is based on genuine social issues, and my dark emotion toward a particular social dynamic is the genesis of the idea for each painting. When people ask me, "Do you love art," I say I don't. In reply, they ask why I don't quit, and I find the question strange. I don't like or dislike shadows, and I don't quit or start making art. Art has been my companion since birth and will continue to be to the end of my lifespan, like my shadow.

RESEARCH

What can we do as a painter? Being born into an artistic family, studying art was a natural path for me as a child. However, I have never called myself an artist, nor called my paintings art. Since childhood, I have felt guilty about creating art that was not an essential basis of life. Doctors save lives, and researchers advance civilization. So, what do artists contribute? When I ask this question, I often hear the answer, "Art makes people happy!" However, I always feel somewhere inside me that those who can afford to enjoy art are already living in a privileged enough environment. If the only goal of artists is that their paintings are bought at auction or by collectors for a high price and used to decorate room interiors, then the paintings would reach only a limited community. Although I have a strong belief that personal problems should be overcome individually without relying on others, I have seen many people during my travels who inevitably cannot change their fate without third-party intervention. They have not necessarily done anything wrong or have not been

lazy but are at a disadvantage simply due to the environment they were born in. I have wondered how art could be relevant to those who are at the mercy of this kind of fate.

I have learned that propaganda art, political cartoons, historical paintings, social paintings, and street art have a purpose other than just as a market commodity. As Paul von Blum said in his book *The Critical Vision: A History of Social and Political Art in the US*, virtually every form of injustice in US history has served to stimulate socially conscious artists. ...Their goal has been to raise public consciousness and to stimulate resistance to repression—not to provide a sophisticated intellectual analysis (3).

Suzanne M. Shifflett, one of MFA's teachers, creates such persuasive art. Although, many art teachers state that art should remain a mystery, causing observers to think; she says painters can even include text to make the message clear. I was deeply impressed by her contrarian approach. Even if my paintings are not recognized as art, and even if they are not universally appreciated, it made me want to create them the way I believe they should be done.

My artistic influences are mostly from non-artistic fields. For example, having worked as a graphic designer prior to enrolling in the MFA program, I developed a keen interest in the strategic process behind visual creation. However, I am uninterested in advertising's purpose of promoting a product or service, but more in how it captivates the attention of viewers who were previously uninterested, manipulating their emotions, and generating their curiosity for a message. While working in Tokyo, I was surrounded by countless advertisements on public transportation and streets, but one in particular has remained etched in my memory. It was a charity ad by a non-profit organization with an image of a studying girl in a developing county, and the text "My life is not determined by

my gender.” This resonated deeply with me as it reflected my own experiences in Japan, where traditional attitudes toward gender remain deeply ingrained. This sparked my interest in reading about the experiences of girls in developing countries. The intent of the person who created this ad led me to relate my personal experience to the experiences of others and influenced my actions and thoughts. Reflecting on this, I realized the power of visual imagery and language to change and raise awareness.

Furthermore, I find it fascinating to listen to speeches and discussions among people in other fields while painting. I’m particularly drawn to those who have a deep understanding of the social sciences, such as sociology, psychology, economics, business administration, political science, law, and education. I am intrigued by their perspectives because they share my interest in exploring how people interact with their environment. However, the main difference between them and artists is that they understand social structure through research, experimentation, and statistical analysis and are able to propose concrete solutions to social issues. Science and art may seem like opposites. I believe it is crucial for certain artists to acquire knowledge based on scientific evidence. Because if the messages in their work solely reflect their personal experiences and emotions, without reference to social facts, viewers may find it difficult to relate them to their own environment.

There is plenty of historical art that has included social messages. But it is very difficult to find art that has specifically influenced society. If artworks have no real effect, they may become just consumer products with a pretense of being socially conscious art. Nevertheless, over time the potential for art to have a greater impact on society may increase. It is important that the places where the public can view art are not limited to museums and galleries. In fact, art is increasingly being seen in public spaces these days. For example,



Fig. 16. (left) Tristan Eaton, *Now & Forever*, 2020, mural, Manhattan New York. (right) Fake, *Super Nurse*, 2020, mural.

graffiti has come to be called street art, and it is increasingly being done legally.

Fig. 16 shows street art honoring the medical professionals who supported our lives in 2020, the year Covid affected the entire world. As the pandemic set in, many people in the US blamed China for

it, prompting a wave of Asian hate crimes. The cover of the April 5, 2021, *New Yorker*

illustrated a vigilant look of an Asian mother and her daughter in a subway station during that period (Fig. 20). The cover was shared across the internet, creating a huge response on

Twitter. Thus, the spread of social networks has made it easier for the public to enjoy art, even if it is initially produced in a print format.

Despite these examples of art that speak to social conditions, I cannot tell if art will help anyone today. However, who in the past would have foreseen a time when people would work from home, women would be presidents, and individuals would have the power to speak out? Therefore, I can say that there is a possibility that art will one day have more impact on society in the future.



Fig. 17. R. Kikuo Johnson, *Delay*, *New Yorker Magazine*, April 5, 2021, Cover.

METHODOLOGY

In a conceptual painting, every element is under the control of its painter. Rather than



Fig. 18. Leonardo da Vinci, *La Gioconda*, c. 1503-1519, Oil on poplar, 30 in. x 21 in., Musée du Louvre, Paris.

pursuing beauty in the view, color, position, form, value, facial expression, or gesture, all these elements are meant to illustrate a concept. One of my mentors, Scott Hess



Fig. 19. Claude Monet, *Impression Sunrise*, 1872, Oil on Canvas, 18.9 x 24.8, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.

described to me how studies in neuroscience and an

understanding of visual perspective can advance representational art education.

Our brains do not receive visual information as it is but compress it or interpret only parts of the entire experience. For example,

Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (Fig. 18) is not in fact smiling as we perceive her. The

sun in Claude Monet's *Impression Sunrise*

(Fig. 19) disappears when viewed in grayscale. Unraveling the implicit intentions

in their paintings is like having a

conversation with them across time and stimulates my intellectual curiosity as a

painter.



Fig. 20. Sumire Kudo, Initial concept sketches, 2022, Pencil on paper, 6" x 4".

I don't spend time consciously thinking about what to paint. If it happens naturally to



Fig. 21. Sumire Kudo, *Toys Sketch*, 2022, Pencil on paper, 5" x 4".

occur to me in my daily life, I will paint it because I personally think that the concept does not exist for the sake of the painting. Instead, the painting exists to show the concept. Before looking for models, I visualize the images in quick sketches like in Fig. 20. At this point, I focus on elements that

illustrate the concept. I then correct the form and value balance. Once the composition is finalized, I look for real models and places that are close to the image in the sketch and re-adjust the composition. This process is time-consuming and labor-intensive, and it would be inefficient if I wanted my paintings to be mass-produced. However, it is important for me that each painting has a highly complex concept, intent, and depiction.

In the case of *Toys* (Fig. 4), I first visualized the work culture theme with a quick sketch (Fig. 21). In the sketch in Fig. 22 A, there was not

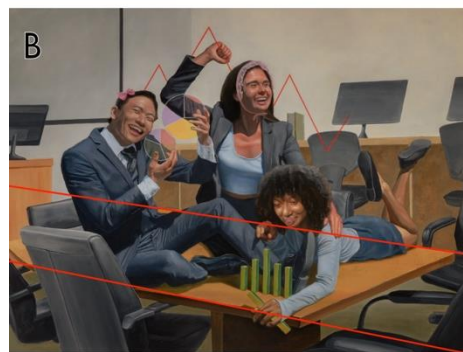


Fig. 22 A and B. Sumire Kudo, *Toys* diagram of perspective.



Fig. 23 A and B. Sumire Kudo, *Toys* diagram of overlapping.

much depth, which made it appear flat. I changed the background to a tabletop jutting into the viewers' space to give a greater sense of depth (Fig. 22 B). The relationship between this table and the figures contributes significantly to making us feel the uncomfortable perception of labor. First, the figures are placed all over the tabletop, and the table surface is barely visible creates an impression of tightness. Second, the figures' luminosity is darker, and the table is lighter. Humans feel that colors with lower luminosity are heavier and colors with higher luminosity are lighter. In *Toys*, figures that look heavy are on a table that looks light, creating a sense of imbalance, as if the figures are about to fall off or overwhelm the table, which is at odds with the smiling faces of the models.

Furthermore, I adjusted the degree of overlap of the figures. In the initial sketch (Fig. 23 A), the action of the figures was separated. However, in the finished painting, the three figures are overlapped, forming one large mass as shown in Fig. 23 B. This creates a more

much depth, which made it appear flat. I changed the background to a tabletop jutting into the viewers' space to give a greater sense of depth (Fig. 22 B). The relationship between this table and the figures contributes significantly to making us feel the uncomfortable perception of labor. First, the figures are placed all over the tabletop, and the table surface is barely visible creates an impression of tightness. Second, the

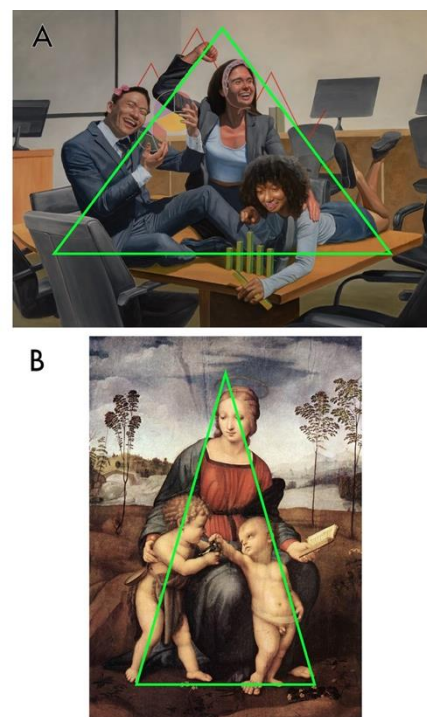


Fig. 24 A and B. *Toys* diagram of shape with Raphael, *Madonna del Cardellino*, 1505–1506, Oil on Canvas, 42" x 30", Galleria degli Uffizi.

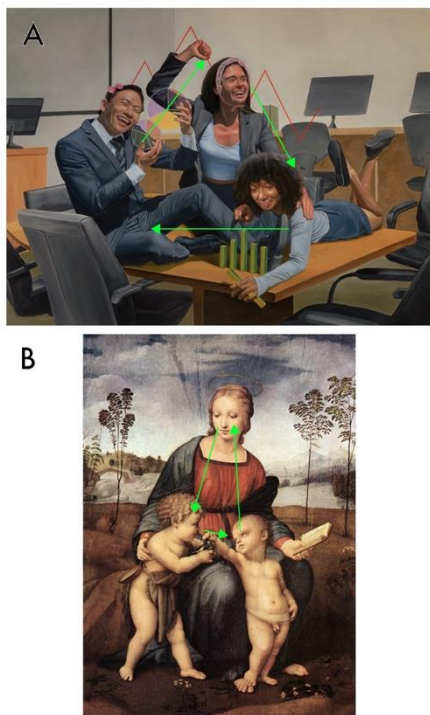


Fig 25 A and B. *Toys* diagram of flow with Raphael, *Madonna del Cardellino*, 1505–1506, Oil on Canvas, 42" x 30", Galleria degli Uffizi.

3-dimensional view and emphasizes the triangular shape created by the three figures as Fig. 24 A. Triangular compositions have often been used in paintings by the old masters, as seen in Raphael's *Madonna del Cardellino* (Fig. 24 B). Such compositions give the impression of stability when the horizontal side of the triangle is located on the bottom. I also changed the gesture. The figures' eyes and their gestures primarily guide the flow in a triangular shape in *Madonna del Cardellino* (Fig. 25 B). The figures' gestures in my painting *Toys* also guide the viewer's eyes (Fig. 25 A).

The
man's

arm guides the viewer's gaze upward, the woman's left hand in the center guides the viewer's gaze downward, and the right woman's hand again turns toward the man. These effects of stability and repetitive fluidity represent our labor, which is part of our daily routine. However, that symbol of labor is on an unstable table, and this structure raises the question of whether that repeated stability



Fig.26. Sumire Kudo, *Female* sketch, 2022, Pencil on paper, 4" x 6".



Fig. 27. Taiji (a symbol of the Chinese concept of yin and yang), Song Wan, Anthony P.C. *Yin, Tai Ji: The law of inflammatory response*, 2002.

is really equated with happiness.

To effectively convey the objectification of women in *Female* (Fig. 1), it was necessary to emphasize the comparison between the normal human male and the exaggerated image of a female sign. To achieve this, I focused on the visual hierarchy of the painting.

In the initial sketch (Fig. 26), the figures were viewed from the back, but I changed it to a frontal view so the man's facial

expression can be compared to the bathroom sign, which has no facial features. When adding the background, I focused on its relation to the figures. This composition was constructed based on the Taiji (Fig. 27), a symbol of the Chinese concept of yin and yang. The open space behind the tall man and the tall building standing behind the short bathroom sign create an even balance between the left and right sides (Fig. 28).

The background surrounding the man's head is a light color so that the shape of his dark hair and shadow that make up the outline of the man's face stand out clearly (Fig. 29). On the other hand, the background surrounding the bathroom sign's head is darker.

This makes its head, which is lighter, clearly visible. The color temperature is also composed

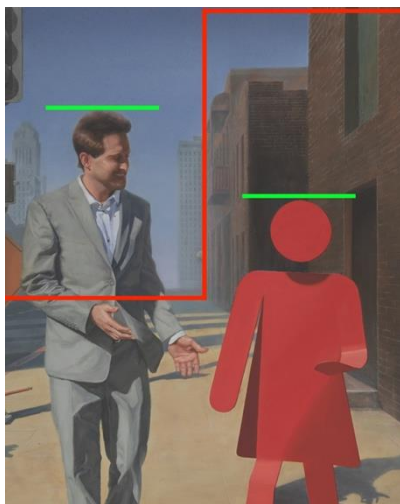


Fig. 28. Sumire Kudo, *Female* Diagram of form, 2022.

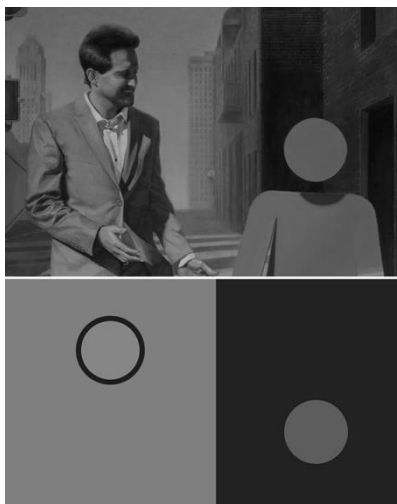


Fig. 29. Sumire Kudo, *Female* Diagram of value, 2022.

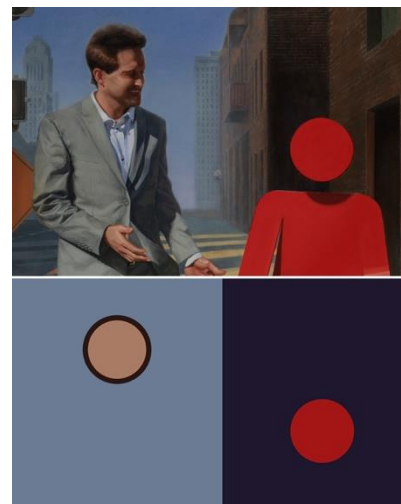


Fig. 30. Sumire Kudo, *Female* Diagram of color temperature, 2022.



Fig. 31. Sumire Kudo, Close up of *Female*.

in such a way that the faces of the two figures stand out. The man's skin and hair color are warm, whereas the sky background is a cool blue. To make the warm red color of the bathroom sign stand out, the shadow part of the buildings in the background is cool purple with blue overlaid on the reddish brick color (Fig. 30).

The bathroom sign is the main element of this painting about sexism. The man is its explanatory element and should not be more prominent than the bathroom sign. Therefore, I made the bathroom sign stand out a little more prominently than the man. First, the main color for the bathroom sign is alizarin crimson mixed with cadmium red, which is a highly saturated paint. Therefore, this is the most saturated part of this painting. Second, the edges of the bathroom sign are the sharpest in this painting. Finally, most of the surfaces of the bathroom sign are painted solidly in one flat color with no texture at all (Fig. 31). Other objects in this work are painted using a variety of colors. By using these tricks that could only exist in a painting, the viewer's eye is instantly drawn to the bathroom sign.

The three female figures in *Selection* (Fig. 2) are painted exactly alike to reinforce stereotypes about appearance. In reality, the three figures would be seen from different

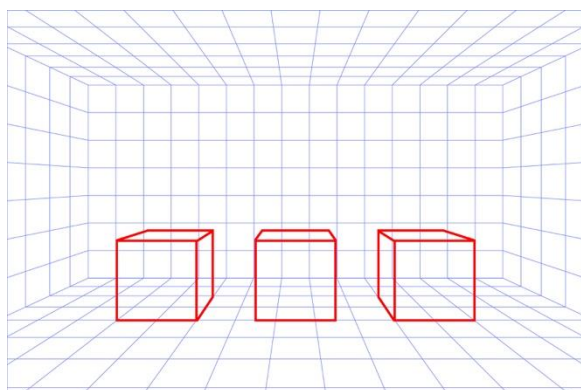


Fig. 32. Sumire Kudo, *Selection* Diagram of perspective in real situations.

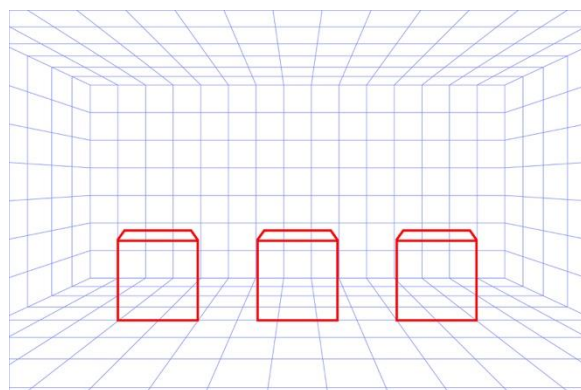


Fig. 33. Sumire Kudo, *Selection* Diagram of perspective.

angles, as in Fig. 32, but in this painting, all three are painted from a straight-on angle, as in Fig. 33. These are inconsistent with the perspective of the room and the light source, and their incongruity emphasizes the similarities of the three figures. In the background, I painted a grid that evokes the physical comparison of the figures. When objects are lined up in a grid, the grid allows us easily to compare their size and shape. This grid also helps us visualize perspective, making it easier to see the perspective discrepancy between the figures and the room.

A painter must convey a message within the very limited constraints of a simple flat surface with no time axis, in contrast to video, music, or 3D sculpture. Figurative painters have acquired academic knowledge and techniques to achieve this. The traditional techniques that have been passed down through the centuries have not succumbed to technological developments and trends and are still being taught today. I believe this is because artists' intentions in their paintings have emotionally resonated with people throughout the generations.

CONCLUSION

Since I dreamed of joining this school eight years ago, I have put in an enormous amount of time, work, and sacrifice towards this singular goal. Today, I am standing here feeling honored to be a part of the MFA program. The messages in my paintings are for all people, but meanwhile, they may have been meant for me to find strength in my loneliness and struggles. My experience of questioning my surroundings since childhood, encountering people from different countries and walks of life, and crossing over into the world of business and academia has given me a special perspective. From these experiences, I feel

nothing could be more significant to me than the theme that unites my artworks. The most important thing for my art making is the message behind the work. This is the one thing that will never change in my life as a painter.

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APPENDIX

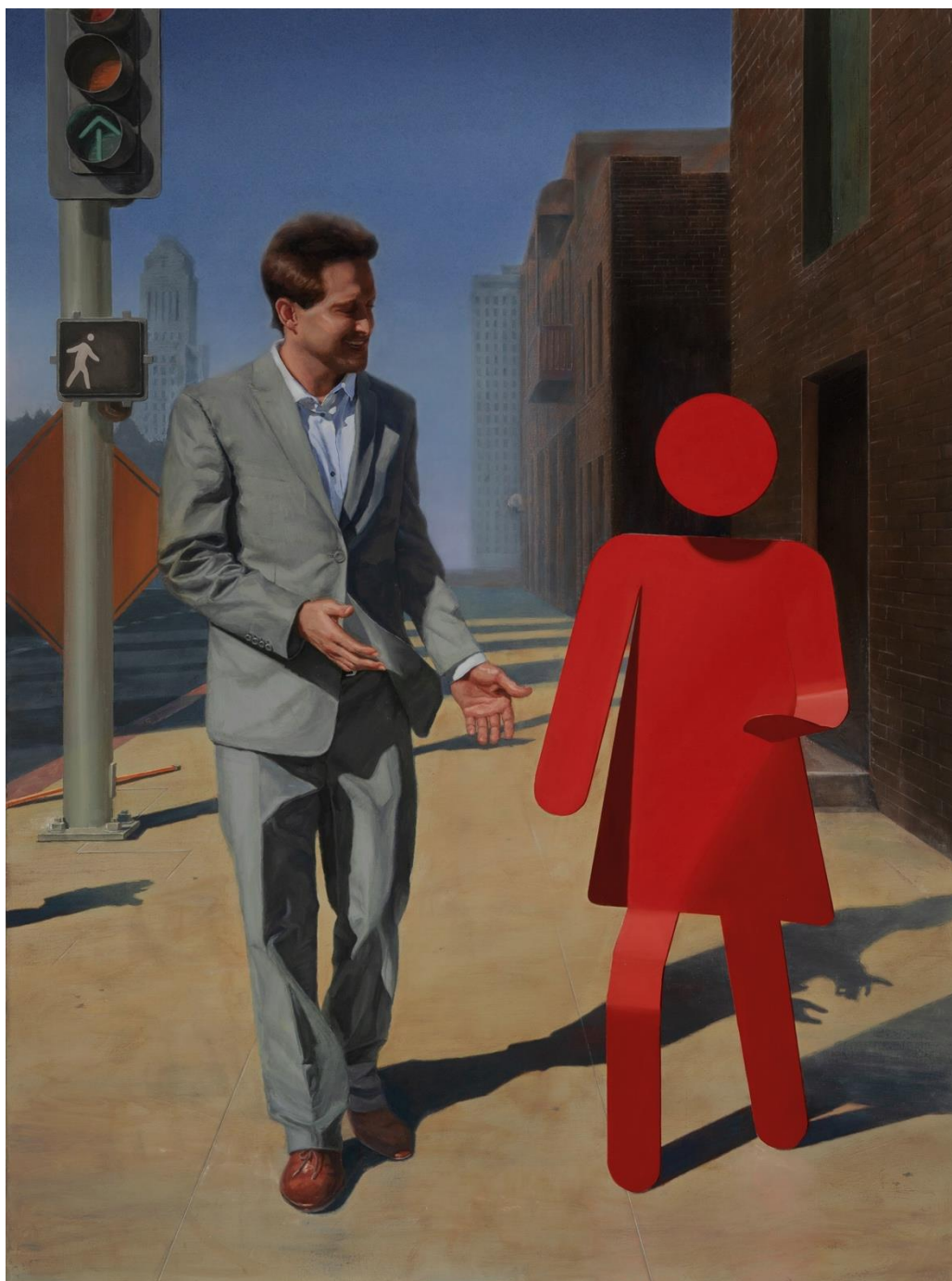


Plate 2. Sumire Kudo, *Female*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48".

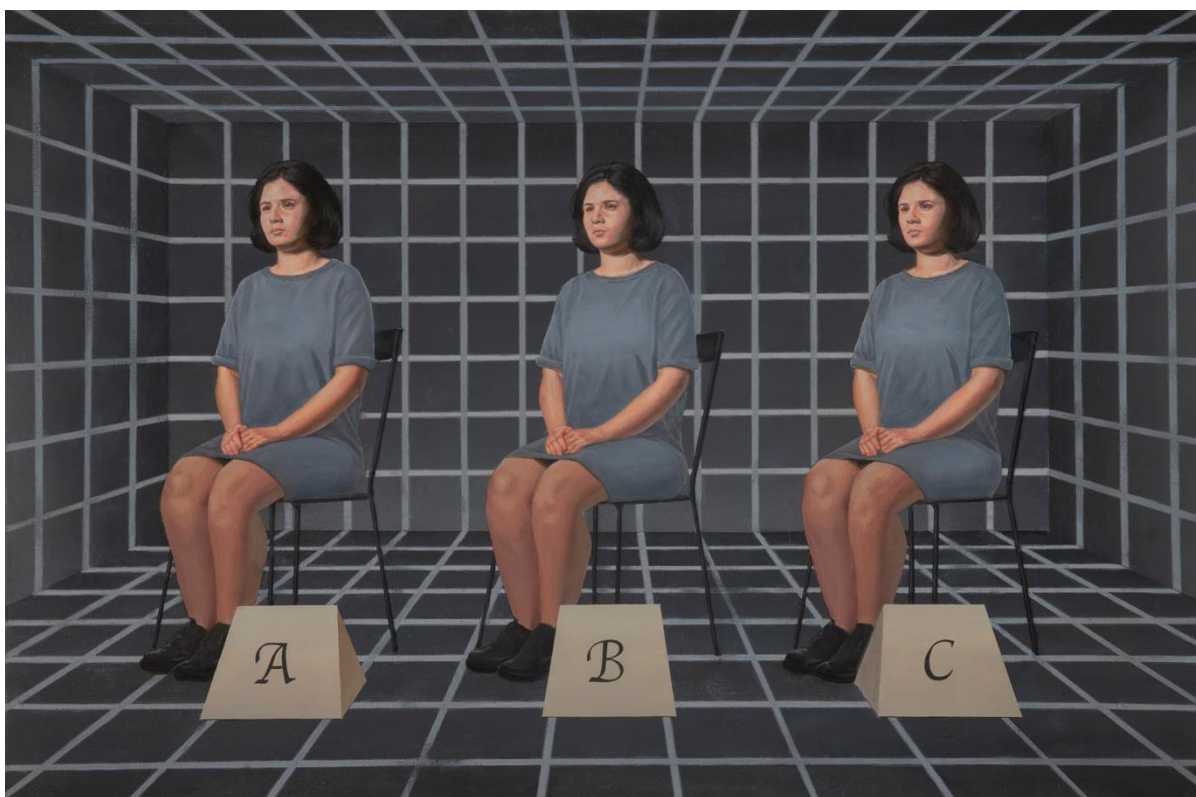


Plate 2. Sumire Kudo, *Selection*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36".



Plate 3. Sumire Kudo, *What You See*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 11" x 14".



Plate 4. Sumire Kudo, *Toys*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 30" x 40".



Plate 5. Sumire Kudo, *Adult*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 24" x 30".



Plate 6. Sumire Kudo, *Imprinting*, 2023, Oil on board, 8" x 10".



Plate 7. Sumire Kudo, *Products*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 22" x 28".

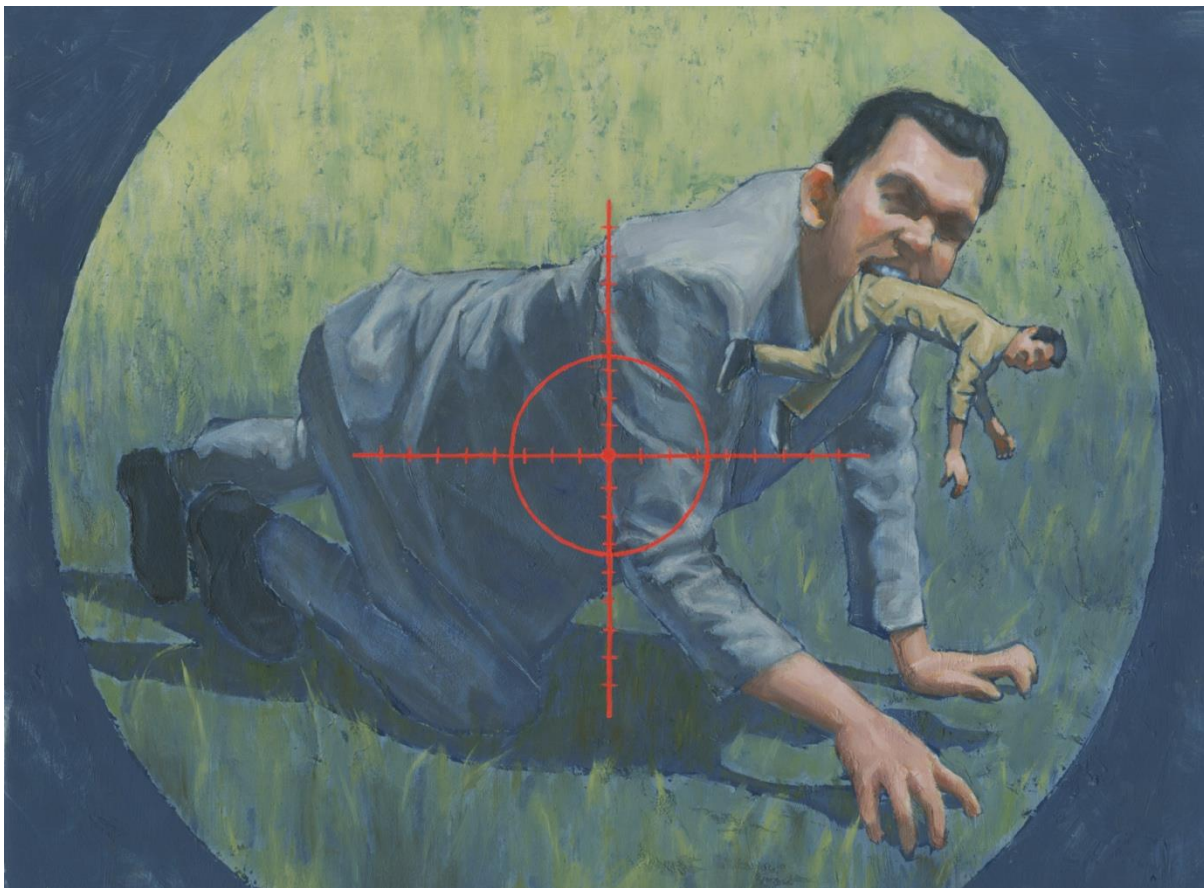


Plate 8. Sumire Kudo, *Eat or Eaten*, 2023, Oil on board, 12" x 16".



Plate 9. Sumire Kudo, *Reputation*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 16" x 20".



Plate 10. Sumire Kudo, *Law*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48".



Plate 11. Sumire Kudo, *Majority*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 22" x 28".



Plate 12. Sumire Kudo, *Foreigners*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 12" x 16".



Plate 13. Sumire Kudo, *Addiction*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 14" x 18".

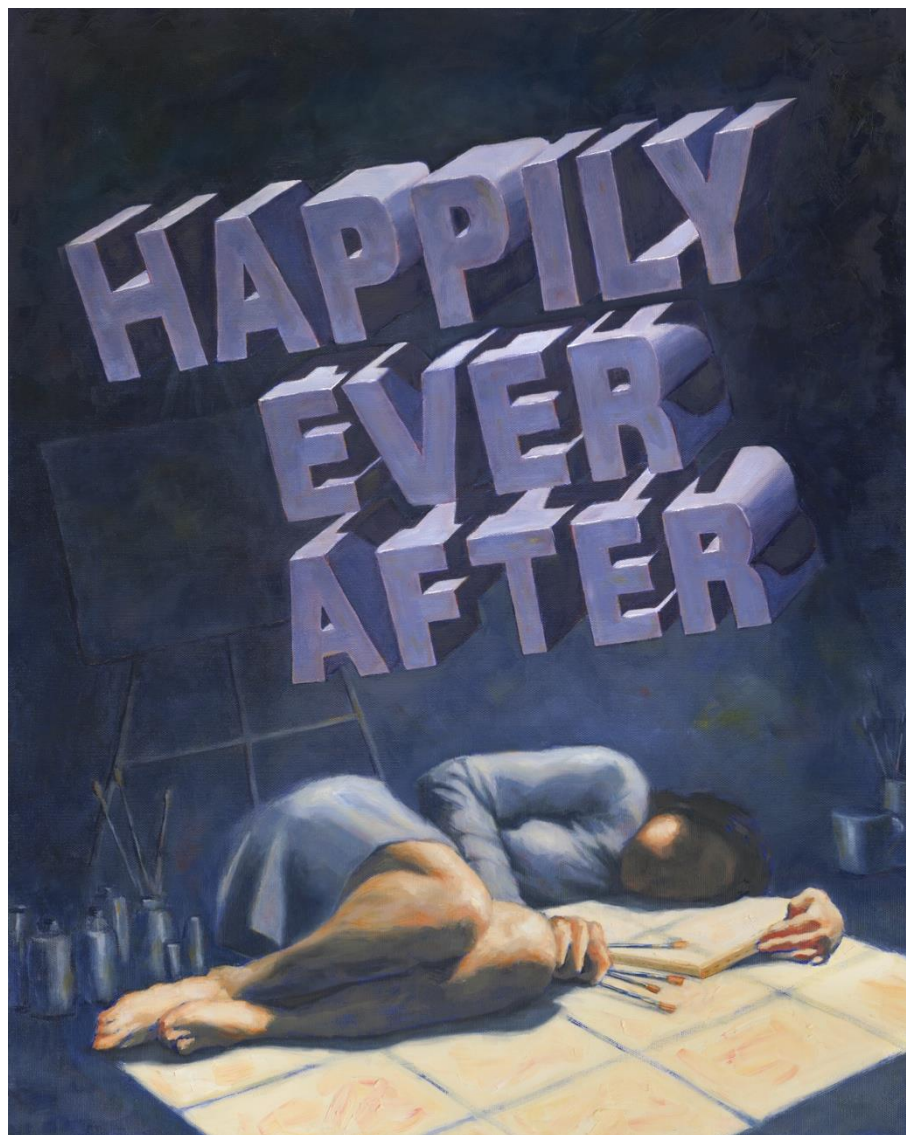


Plate 14. Sumire Kudo, *Happiness*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 24" x 30".



Plate 15. Sumire Kudo, *Peace*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 24" x 30".

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