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# Dweller

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William Christensen

# Artist Statement

Drawing and painting fall into my comfort zone. I've been drawing since I was a

child, and have the most experience articulating my ideas with pencil and paper. On the

other hand, painting also gives me a variety of options to work with: color, blending, size,

texture, and more techniques to experiment with than drawing. This excitement and drive

to explore and experiment with different possibilities is what I continue to investigate. I

push myself to un-chartered territory to rejuvenate my love for painting and through my

research and my series of paintings, I want to be able to answer the question, "Why paint?"

In my quest to figure out what it is I like about painting, I am also truly looking at myself as a subject matter, which hasn't always been the case. Whether it is fear or feelings of inadequacy, I have failed to turn my artistic eye onto myself. In my most

recent artwork I have turned to myself as the subject matter and put my own insecurities

out there for the public view rather than hiding behind the abstract, or pop icon portrait.

I have transformed myself into a comic book character, and the need to

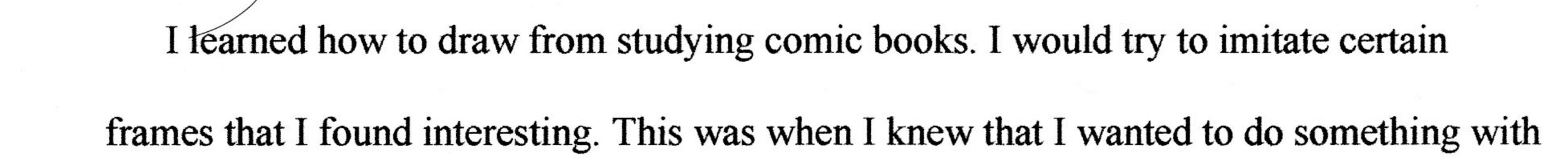
overcompensate in these portraits become a necessity to make myself look better

composed rings true to the idea that comic books and their superheroes serve as a fantasy

of what a male wants, or is expected to be. The perfect body, or being calm under

pressure and in complete control no longer become the ideal, but are the necessary

characteristics that I want in order to be a man.



art because I wanted to continue to draw and hone my skills even while I grew. I didn't know what I wanted to do in art, but I knew that I wanted to be an artist. When I was an undergrad I found the joys and challenges of abstract painting, and I thought it was the thing that I would do for the rest of my life. I still love abstract painting, but after five years it started to become a little formulaic for me. The figure

became the new challenge for my direction, and I wanted to discover a way to

reincorporate the figure. I tried to experiment with an array of various approaches in

order to accomplish this, and usually with different pop icons like Albert Einstein, Joseph

Stalin and Samuel Colt. Through feedback from my peers, faculty, and visiting artists I

felt that I needed to turn the lens onto myself, and focus on the self-portrait. I also came

full circle and brought back my love for the comic book style, and started to turn myself

into a comic style character, which I find fitting to return to the comic book style of

drawing during my graduate studies.

The narrative has also become equally important to me. I have always written short

stories and poems, but I felt that was a separate thing, a side project, and now I realize

that all those stories should be intertwined with my artwork and exhibitions, and think of

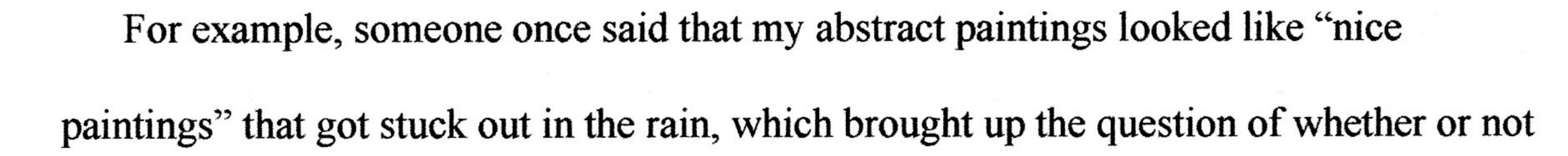
it as a unified project and not just a conceptual piece.

The purpose of my work has seemed to be to challenge and investigate the issues of

painting and beauty. By using myself as protagonist in a story that I have written, a more

personal and honest theme is accomplished. More so than my previous investigations

with the portraits of different pop icons or abstract paintings.



the painting is still a "nice painting" and when can, if at all, a painting lose its attractiveness, or beauty. I am still using that same approach, but from a more personal angle. By turning myself into an idealized male figure based on comic book stereotypes, I am turning myself into the "nice painting" and having a personal dialogue, "Now that I am masculine, can I ever not be masculine?"

The "identity" type theory that one might gather from a theorist such as Rosalind

Krauss is also something that I have been investigating in my more recent work. The

question of what makes a man... a man in today's society, is a particular focus of mine. I

am also a fan of Dave Hickey's attitude towards art, that art doesn't, and shouldn't, take itself so seriously all the time.

Shaun "El C" Leonardo is an artist in today's market that is dealing with the same

masculinity issues that I am, and he is also using the comic book style format in order to

tackle this subject. These ideas of manhood that were implanted in my subconscious as a

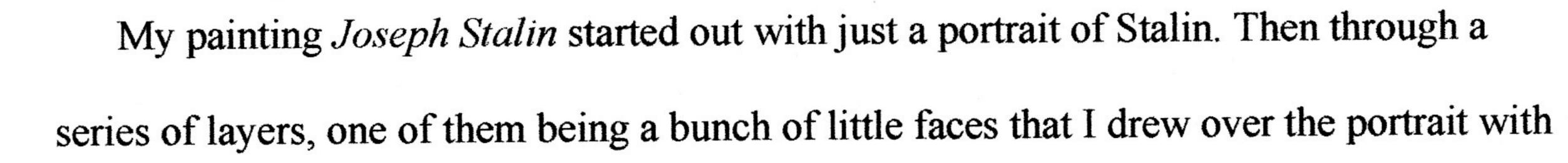
young impressionable kid, looking towards comic books as a source of inspiration and

entertainment are still very relevant to me and worth investigating.

Through different methods I will deconstruct and deform my original artwork in order

to accomplish my ideas. By deconstructing my work it can raise the question of what is acceptable in painting, drawing, and/or art in general to the viewer. For example, I may start with just a portrait, but through a series of layers I will begin to take away from the portrait. Then the painting is no longer just about the portrait, but it is also about the

medium of paint on a canvas and the layers and their meanings.



charcoal, I began to cover up the portrait. Afterwards the painting wasn't just about the portrait of Stalin, but it also came to be about the idea of trying to move on from a dark past. The little faces representing a nation of people trying to forget the actions of an evil dictator in order to progress, but the stigma of those actions can be hard for a group of people to leave behind.

The portrait of Stalin is an example of investigating these issues from a looser angle. I

have also tried this from a more exact approach by using a mathematical formula for

perfection known as PHI, as in the case with the portrait of Albert Einstein. I wanted to

use the Golden Rectangle for this portrait of Albert Einstein because of its mathematical complexity. The Golden Rectangle is based off PHI. The canvas size is 36" x 58 1/4" and after putting in a 36" square there is another area remaining (36" x 22 1/4"). This smaller

rectangle has the same proportions as the overall size of the canvas. Just like PI, this

golden rectangle goes on forever, so PHI is usually rounded off at 1.618.

What I find interesting about PHI is the idea of it being this value of perfection.

Because of its ability to go on forever though, it is left up to an outside party to make it a

manageable number, and in doing so the number no longer becomes objective. I believe

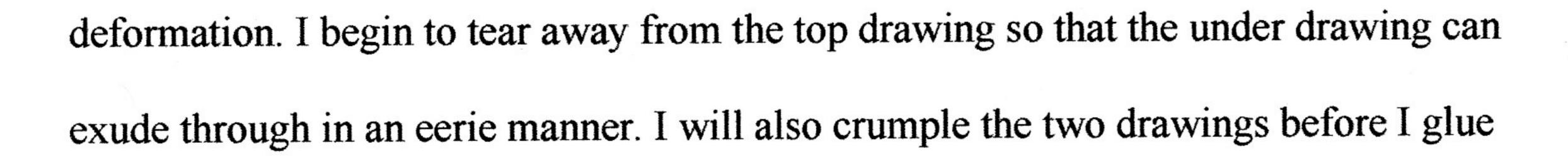
that it is just as subjective as the idea of beauty to each individual viewer.

I will also begin to deconstruct the painting as I did in the work that I'm doing for my

Master's project exhibition. There are two drawings glued on top of each other. One of

them is a self-portrait, and the other drawing, that sits on the other, is an inked in drawing

taken from a scene of a short story that I wrote. Next, there is the deconstruction and



them together, and with this I am signifying the frailty of the artwork and the sanity of the character from the story.

My major influences range from the technically sound painters of the Renaissance,

like Michelangelo and Da Vinci, to the humor based Pop Art movement. Andy Warhol

and Jean-Michelle Basquiat have strongly influenced my work. Basquiat's childlike

interpretation of historical figures and celebrities along with his infatuation with death

gave Basquiat's paintings feelings of depression and morbidity. Another big influence on

my work is Gerhard Richter. I admire the way that Richter will blur his imagery to create

a dream-like sense of nostalgia and uncertainty about the past. Some of my other painting heroes are Richard Jackson, Llyn Foulkes, and Wayne White. Seeing Richard Jackson at the Orange County Museum of Art, Llyn Foulkes at the Hammer, and watching the

documentary Beauty is Embarrassing on Wayne White have helped to shape my

perspective on art, and reinforced the idea that it's ok to make art because you enjoy

doing it, and to be in art for art's sake.

Craig Kauffman is another artist that I am influenced by. I saw his Constructed

Paintings series in Los Angeles and it was awe-inspiring. These constructed paintings

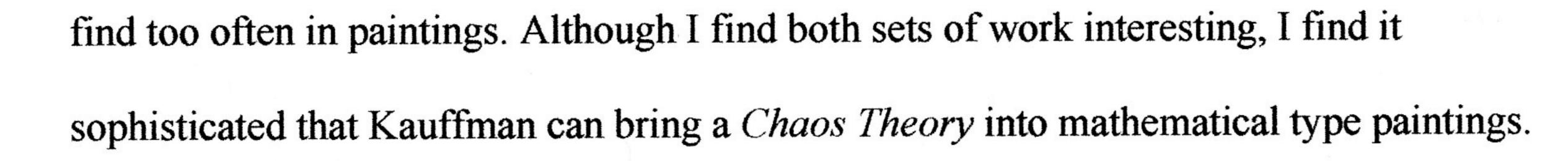
reminded me of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch painter Piet Mondrian. Kauffman's paintings

are just on a more massive scale; they are still alluding to geometric shapes and colors.

Mondrian's work is more controlled and therefore subtler. Whereas, I find Kauffman's

paintings more in your face and chaotic, which communicates violence in his work. I

don't think that a combination of violence and geometrical shapes is something that you



My work is dealing with identity issues and the self-image obsession that one might

have with insecurity issues. The idea of turning myself into a superhero is the vehicle that

I use in order to emphasize a person trying desperately to seem more masculine and grasp

the attention of the viewer.

My work stems from the pop art movement with Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol,

but is more rooted in the contemporary movement of bringing the comic book style into

the fine art world. Artists like Raymond Petabond, Shawn "El – C" Leonardo, and Jim

Shaw are part of a movement that I see myself apart of. In particular, Jim Shaw's book,

Dreams is an idea similar to the focal point of my current work.

My current work relates to my older work in the sense that it has always had

something to do with myself; I just don't think that I have realized that until more

recently. Whether it is my abstract paintings or figurative paintings, and even some

landscape paintings they have all been focused on ideas that I continue to investigate.

Some of those ideas have been my obsession with beauty and the idea of making a

painting that philosophically proves it beauty while having an underhanded conflict for

the viewer. Recently, my work has been about turning myself into a beautiful object.

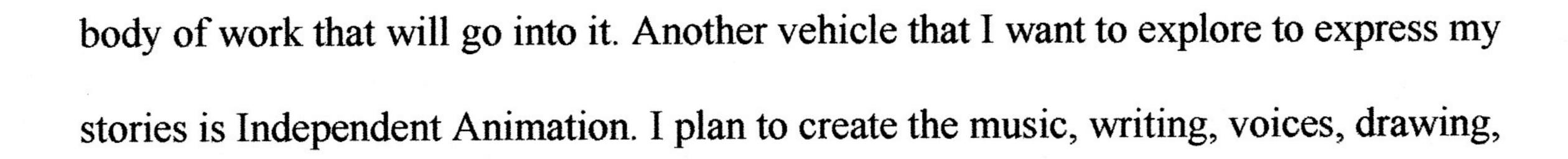
I see my work still incorporating the narrative, but almost turning into

installation/painting narratives where the whole gallery becomes the comic book. The

walls become the pages of the book, and the pieces of the art become frames within the

pages of the book. I want to create cohesive exhibitions blending the separation of the

gallery and the work into one by treating the exhibition space as equally important as the



# inking, and coloring. I have found some inspiration from independent animator Bill Plympton.

There are always questions concerning the unknown after graduation, but with all of

the territory that I have now chartered I feel ready to pursue those adventures and

questions. My Master's Project Exhibition has spawned many more ideas for different

bodies of work, and I am looking forward to the chapter in my life as a professional artist.