

6-2014

Dweller

William Christensen

California State University - San Bernardino

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Christensen, William, "Dweller" (2014). *Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations*. 250.
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/250>

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Graduate Studies at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

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.

I learned how to draw from studying comic books. I would try to imitate certain frames that I found interesting. This was when I knew that I wanted to do something with

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.

For example, someone once said that my abstract paintings looked like "nice paintings" that got stuck out in the rain, which brought up the question of whether or not

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.

My painting *Joseph Stalin* started out with just a portrait of Stalin. Then through a series of layers, one of them being a bunch of little faces that I drew over the portrait with

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 deformation. I begin to tear away from the top drawing so that the under drawing can exude through in an eerie manner. I will also crumple the two drawings before I glue

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 20th 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 find too often in paintings. Although I find both sets of work interesting, I find it sophisticated that Kauffman can bring a *Chaos Theory* into mathematical type paintings.

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 Pettibond, 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 body of work that will go into it. Another vehicle that I want to explore to express my stories is Independent Animation. I plan to create the music, writing, voices, drawing,

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.