

PRETTY COLOR TIME

A Thesis

by

JACK ARTHUR WOOD JR.

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

“Ryan O’Malley, MFA”  
Chair

“Rich Gere, MFA”  
Co-Chair

“Dr. Laura Petican, PhD”  
Committee Member

December 2017

## ABSTRACT

“Pretty Color Time” is the language that underscores my intertwined practices of painting, printmaking, collage, and theoretical study over the past year and several months. It is a culmination of three years of work rendering landscapes with particular regard for color, joy, anxiety, sexuality, and the horizon as a stratum of impermanence regarding spectral light, the essence of phenomena, and notions of a queer utopia that are forever receding.

In describing the theoretical mythos of my work, I have chosen to make thoroughgoing investigations of queer theory, sublime theory, Buddhist emptiness theory, Lacanian semiotics of anxiety and desire, and the methodologies and meanings underlying the works of artists whose work I revere. I have also conducted direct interviews with Queens, NY based painter Caroline Wells Chandler (b.1985). My interviews with Caroline have proved an invaluable resource in both formulation of and motivation for my work.

The work I make fixates on simultaneity; my paintings of sublime phenomena articulate manic energy as surrounding oscillations between binary fixed points. This occurs through great attention to detail in the description of abstract spaces taken as portals, or emanating an inner light, most often as horizons. In both instances, the call is to the journey, of traveling space where immediacy seems to replace time, forward is the movement, and change is a constant. I believe this space is unbound and infinite, allowing the simultaneity of what Chandler calls the “Third Layer” to arise outside of normative time – in between gender and sexuality – in a realm of embodiment that is given to creativity and the cultivation of, or even hunger for, adaptation. This idea is underscored and even mirrored by Buddhist emptiness, and the Object-Oriented Ontology construct of the Hyperobject.

My findings affirm my life, work, and the professional community I am building for myself in the creative world. Through the process of matriculation I have engendered a practice of art making I believe will lead me through life as a benevolent seeker.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this writing to Caroline Wells Chandler.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Throughout the process of earning this degree I have made many travels and maintained a practice of writing art reviews, making studio visits, and conducting phone interviews. This process has been fueling my fire. I would like to thank Kathryn Shields, Ryan O'Malley, Daniel Brown, David Kirley, Dan Heskamp, Oscar Guerra, Lisette Chavez, Jorge Alegría, Rachel

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## INTRODUCTION: OUR PRESENT

2017 is an anxious time to be alive and thinking critically in the United States. Last year when Trump was elected I had just come out queer, I ordered a pair of iridescent brass knuckles out of fear and took them everywhere. I was awash in paranoia. I researched automatic weapons with intent to protect myself. Being in Texas I am unanchored; I lost perspective in the fever of outrage and panic that was spreading everywhere. Naturally, I was glad to receive a phone call from my best friend Danny Sapperstein (b.1990) who lives in Washington D.C. but couldn't have expected his story. Danny explained something called *Pizzagate*. He told me there was an Alt. Right rumor circulating through the online forums Reddit and 4Chan claiming Hillary Clinton was running a pedophilic sex ring out of the basement of Comet Ping Pong, the pizza place where Danny tends bar. A bunch of our mutual friends work there too. Much to everyone's surprise, Danny and the entire staff of Comet were doxed<sup>1</sup> by Alt Right hacktivists. Then, Edgar Welch showed up with an AR-15 to find out the truth for himself. He fired his weapon several times inside the restaurant and demanded to be shown the underground tunnels and sex dungeon. Comet doesn't have a basement. Fortunately, Welch surrendered to police without hurting anyone.

Within hours of Welch's arrest, online conspiracy theorists had already decided that he was not one of them. Some suggested he was a "false flag," a government plant — an enemy of their cause — who had been used in an elaborate plot to conceal the truth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To be doxed is to have one's personal information maliciously distributed all over the internet.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Fisher, John Woodrow Cox, and Peter Hermann, *Pizzagate: From Rumor, to Hashtag, to Gunfire in D.C.*, The Washington Post, December 06, 2016, accessed November 05, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/pizzagate-from-rumor-to-hashtag-to-gunfire-in-dc/2016/12/06/4c7def50-bbd4-11e6-94ac-3d324840106c\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9e4f89189851](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/pizzagate-from-rumor-to-hashtag-to-gunfire-in-dc/2016/12/06/4c7def50-bbd4-11e6-94ac-3d324840106c_story.html?utm_term=.9e4f89189851).

We live in a moment where information is disseminated and amplified by entities we can no longer detect, through channels with which many of us may not be familiar. Many of the initial retweets that incited *Pizzagate* originated from ‘bots’ in the Czech Republic and Vietnam. Where the bots themselves originated is still unknown, but someone, somewhere had insidious intentions.<sup>3</sup>

The several weeks turning October into November 2017 made testament to our culture’s terror teleology. As of this writing, 59 innocent people were slaughtered and 567 injured in the Las Vegas massacre,<sup>4</sup> firemen have been trying to investigate smoke at the Russian Consulate in San Francisco through a barred entry,<sup>5</sup> Paul Manafort and Rick Gates have surrendered to the FBI on suspicions of colluding with Russians during the 2017 presidential campaign,<sup>6</sup> and Trump traveled to Asia, where prospects of nuclear holocaust loom beneath Kim Jong-un’s middle-parted pompadour.<sup>7</sup>

For the past year, despite my best efforts to maintain ignorance for sanity’s sake, all of this shit—and it is—has compounded. It’s *exhausting*. I’ve come to expect horrible news every four days, and the internet is information hell.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lynh Bui et al., *At Least 59 Killed in Las Vegas Shooting Rampage, More than 500 Others Injured*, The Washington Post, October 02, 2017, accessed November 03, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Sophie Tatum and Laura Koran, *Smoke Spotted Coming from Russian Consulate Ahead of Facility Closure*, CNN, September 02, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Sollenberger, *How the Trump-Russia Data Machine Games Google to Fool Americans*, Pastemagazine.com, June 1, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Meg Wagner, Amanda Wills, and Brian Ries, *Paul Manafort and Rick Gates Surrender to FBI: Live Updates*, CNN, October 30, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/30/politics/russia-investigation-manafort-latest/index.html>.



For instance, despite widespread media exposure and mass protest of racially motivated police killings, *The Washington Post* reports 991 and 963 fatal police shootings for 2015 and 2016 respectively. On June 30th of 2017, the count was tracking to match this at 492.<sup>8</sup> Just before the shooting in Las Vegas, right wing politicians had been trying to pass the S.H.A.R.E. Act to legalize silencers for firearms.<sup>9</sup>

This atmosphere of paranoia and trauma is omnipresent. It is in the water and of the water. It is the environment. This year's hurricane season was the most devastating since Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005 which reduced the city's population by more than half.<sup>10</sup> Without precedent, three category 4 hurricanes made landfall in the United States and annexed island territories in 2017.<sup>11</sup> Although I cannot say that I lost anything, Harvey, predicted to be the costliest hurricane on record, caused me to run for my life. Ireland received Hurricane Ophelia, the furthest easterly traveling Atlantic cyclone on record.<sup>12</sup> Hurricanes don't *fuckin*g reach Ireland. In April of 2017, a record high of 410 parts per million of carbon dioxide was

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<sup>8</sup> John Sullivan et al., *Number of Fatal Shootings by Police Is Nearly Identical to Last Year*, The Washington Post, July 01, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/number-of-fatal-shootings-by-police-is-nearly-identical-to-last-year/2017/07/01/98726cc6-5b5f-11e7-9fc6-c7ef4bc58d13\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c30b5fa54bab](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/number-of-fatal-shootings-by-police-is-nearly-identical-to-last-year/2017/07/01/98726cc6-5b5f-11e7-9fc6-c7ef4bc58d13_story.html?utm_term=.c30b5fa54bab).

<sup>9</sup> Gideon Resnick and Andrew Desiderio, *How Donald Trump Jr. Helped Push the Now Highly Controversial Gun Silencer Bill*, The Daily Beast, October 02, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-donald-trump-jr-helped-push-the-now-highly-controversial-gun-silencer-bill>.

<sup>10</sup> *Hurricane Katrina Statistics Fast Facts*, CNN, August 28, 2017, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/us/hurricane-katrina-statistics-fast-facts/index.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Maggie Astor, *The 2017 Hurricane Season Really Is More Intense Than Normal*, The New York Times, September 19, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/19/us/hurricanes-irma-harvey-maria.html>.

<sup>12</sup> *Hurricane Ophelia: Three People Die as Storm Hits Ireland*, BBC News, October 17, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-41627442>.

measured in our atmosphere.<sup>13</sup> The Great Barrier Reef is DEAD.<sup>14</sup> We are supposedly past the point of no return. We have resource-raped our planet into impending oblivion. The entropy I feel and internalize recalls *Wave of Mutilation*, The Pixies' 1989 smash hit from *Doolittle*.

Cease to resist, giving my goodbye  
Drive my car into the ocean  
You'll think I'm dead, but I sail away  
On a wave of mutilation...<sup>15</sup>

Despite science laying bare the reality of climate change, major marches, and some truly effective efforts in organizing against many of Trump's initiatives, none of it sounds like enough to me; we have already ceased resisting. Then again, I'm not showing up. I say these things aloud and even I think I sound like a jerk. Arizona Republican Senator Jeff Flake (b. 1962) recently summed it up well:

Reckless, outrageous, and undignified behavior has become excused and countenanced as telling it like it is when it is actually just reckless, outrageous, and undignified. And when such behavior emanates from the top of our government, it is something else. It is dangerous to a democracy. Such behavior does not project strength, because our strength comes from our values. It, instead, projects a corruption of the spirit and weakness.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brian Kahn, *We Just Breached the 410 Parts Per Million Threshold*, Climate Central, April 20, 2017, accessed November 05, 2017, <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/we-just-breached-the-410-parts-per-million-threshold-21372>.

<sup>14</sup> Damien Cave And Justin Gillis, *Large Sections of Australia's Great Reef Are Now Dead, Scientists Find*, The New York Times, March 15, 2017, accessed November 05, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/science/great-barrier-reef-coral-climate-change-dieoff.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Black, writer, *Wave of Mutilation*, perf. The Pixies, recorded 1989, in *Doolittle*, The Pixies, Elektra/Asylum Records, 1989, cassette.

<sup>16</sup> Ella Nilsen, *None of This Is Normal: Read the Full Transcript of Sen. Jeff Flake's Blistering Retirement Speech*, Vox, October 24, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/2017/10/24/16537284/full-transcript-flake-retirement-speech>.

The power of the masses is undone by cakes and circuses.<sup>17</sup> Brooke Gladstone, a righteously resonant journalistic voice of our time, says Trump has killed consensus, and thereby upset democracy. There is no center around which we form opinions and deviations. Instead, Trump enables subjectivity's giant leaps. He has muddied truth, engineering one distraction after another. He has perfected the pre-existing machine of social media to confuse and proliferate lies. According to *New York Times*' David Brooks, "His falsehoods are attempts to build a world in which he can feel good for an instant and comfortably deceive himself."<sup>18</sup> Trump's Twitter stream of self-aggrandizing bullshit is an apt political soundtrack for culturally pandemic narcissism – the calling card of the 'information age.' Our lived experience is commanded by the panoptic gaze of social media. Each of us is the charming protagonist in a movie we can't stop watching.

*Pizzagate* bothered me personally by involving my loved ones, suddenly inserting the murder porn of the nightly news into the daydreaming of my daily life. This instance of terror defies my imagination, and makes my life surreal. Incursions such as these, where the notion of truth evaporates into poison ether often make me wonder if I should carry on my work; and yet they will become more common. Sometimes I feel completely lost in a negative free dive. Sometimes, crossing the bridge onto the island where the university sits, I bitterly think that maybe I should drive my car into the ocean, that maybe it would just be better to sail away.

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<sup>17</sup> Brooke Gladstone, *Why Trump Lies*, Slate Magazine, May 18, 2017, accessed November 04, 2017, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2017/05/why\\_trump\\_lies\\_it\\_s\\_not\\_to\\_hide\\_the\\_truth\\_it\\_s\\_to\\_alter\\_reality.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2017/05/why_trump_lies_it_s_not_to_hide_the_truth_it_s_to_alter_reality.html).

<sup>18</sup> David Brooks, *Opinion | When the World Is Led by a Child*, The New York Times, May 15, 2017, accessed November 05, 2017, <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/opinion/trump-classified-data.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&referrer=http%3A%2F%2Fm.facebook.com>.

I know in my heart this is bullshit. One of my privileged, life-affirming experiences during graduate school is having met many ‘many gendered mothers of the heart,’<sup>19</sup> as characterized by the American writer Maggie Nelson (b. 1973) and to have acquired many new members in my personal posse of interdimensional demons, as the American artist Caroline Wells Chandler (b.1985) refers to them.<sup>20</sup> Both concepts queer the idea of family, or even more basically affirmation, away from its normative bearings. Queers, sometimes misunderstood, or worse, disavowed by their genetic family, reify the term by building their own. In *The Argonauts* (2015) Nelson relates, among many other things, the experience of becoming a mother and step mother in a queer relationship with her partner Harry Dodge, at one point turning the phrase ‘toxic maternal’:

The phrase “toxic maternal” refers to a mother whose milk delivers poison along with nourishment. If you turn away from the poison, you also turn away from the nourishment. Given that human breast milk now contains literal poisons, from paint thinners to dry-cleaning fluid to toilet deodorizers to rocket fuel to DDT to flame retardants, there is literally no escape. Toxicity is now a question of degree, of acceptable parts per unit. Infants don’t get to choose—they take what they can get, in their scramble to stay alive.<sup>21</sup>

I do not intend to co-opt Nelson’s motherhood, and will likely never understand parenthood, especially not giving birth, but I can relate to the experience of creation. In my work, and in living, against normative notions, I am taking what I can get (which is quite a lot). I am sensing my path with piecemeal vision and impromptu tools. Through creating artwork I am fortifying my life force in a relational way in spite of an oppositional toxic flow. I seek an imagination

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<sup>19</sup> Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (London: Melville House UK, 2016), 57.

<sup>20</sup> Emily Burns, *Caroline Wells Chandler*, Maake Magazine, 2016, section goes here, accessed September 18, 2016, <http://www.maakemagazine.com/caroline-wells-chandler/>.

<sup>21</sup> Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (London: Melville House UK, 2016), 100.

beyond the dark and raw-mechanical sublime we've created through global proliferation of capitalism. The only way out is through.

### ENTERING THE THIRD LAYER: INSIDE A TIME OF PRETTY COLORS

I stood in the grass, in my shoes,  
like a foreigner  
in the nature I loved.  
It's so, so hard to tell  
If it's really, really true.  
It used to be the two of us,  
But now it's three.  
See your mind makes faces,  
See your mind makes faces in the mirror at you.<sup>22</sup>  
-Arthur Russell

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The work that comprises *Pretty Color Time* is motivated by several interrelated ideas that are communicatively in flux. My works—painted, printed, or collaged—reach for the same sensibilities; a philosophically and ideologically mixed bag naming joy and hope as unlikely redeemers. Considered herein are a series of theoretical approaches including: Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) sublime, queer futurity via the late scholar of queer performative studies Jose Esteban Muñoz (1967-2013), and queer time via queer scholar Judith Halberstam (b.1961). Further supplementary queer theories are considered, including *Pink Labor on Golden Streets*,<sup>23</sup> a documentation of the 2012 symposium *Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction*, Renate Lorenz's *Queer Art, A Freak Theory*; and *Otherwise, Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* edited by Amelia Jones (b.1961), and Erin Silver. The fetishized surface recalling the Chicago

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<sup>22</sup> Arthur Russell et al., writers, *Love Is Overtaking Me*, Rough Trade, 2008, MP3.

<sup>23</sup> *Pink labor on Golden Streets will be Referred to as P.L.O.G.S. from here on out.*

Imagists and Hairy Who are also discussed as formally influential to my work. A saturation of all these qualities is suffused (perhaps loosely) with the simultaneity of being and nonbeing.<sup>24</sup> The latter stems from the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika Buddhist tradition *vis-à-vis* second-century South Indian philosopher and Buddhist saint Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – c. 250 CE). Nāgārjuna's philosophy regarding dependent arising, causality, and emptiness reify my interpretation of Kant and other theories of the sublime concerning landscape painting and our place within it, and simultaneously, without it. Maybe humanity's place in the landscape is rather small, or even not at all. The combination of queer theories and Buddhist philosophies will be rounded out and posited with the *Object-Oriented Ontology* of ecological philosopher Timothy Morton (b.1968) who approaches Buddhist ontologies in an understated fashion that nearly erases religiosity. Qualities of simultaneity, that is, expressive of seemingly inoperable dual natures or dissonance, are the glue that binds these ideologies despite their temporal distances from one another, adding greater valence in combination. Theories of the Sublime and the Homoerotic Sublime, queer horizon-based futurity, and Buddhist emptiness theory are Frankensteined together in my writing to weave theoretical, meta-colored descriptions of my work in practice. This amalgam is temporally polyphonic, a philosophical *Jabberwocky*, and a queer triumph in processes towards personal progress, where failure is a constant participle in further becoming.<sup>25</sup> The term Frankenstein describes a method of hyper-relationality that I have mainly observed in queer

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<sup>24</sup> Nagarjuna and Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). 316.

<sup>25</sup> Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

theory. It is a term that Caroline Wells Chandler (b.1985) often uses,<sup>26</sup> and an expression Berlin based artist and scholar Renate Lorenz beautifully qualifies in her study *Queer Art: A Freak*

*Theory:*

In a similar sense, Elizabeth Freeman takes up the narrative of the low-budget film *The Sticky Fingers of Time* by Hilary Brougher (1997). In the film, a scene narrates from a novel in which Frankenstein sows himself into the tomato bed that the girl reaps and later eats is read by Freeman as a queer form of reproduction. She points out that this model instead takes up motifs like obligation and belonging and she accordingly suggests the term “binding” as a form of connection to queer predecessors.<sup>27</sup>

This sort of joyfully cannibal teleology characterizes my method of research. I employ an alchemy of immediacy in my pursuits that is genuine to my location in the present moment. I effectively try to responsibly make use of all the resources I can knowingly expound.

This progress of failure I perceive as the backbone of creativity in pursuit of efficacy, is so fecund in perpetual movement that I venture that it cannot be found. The principal goal, or rather, elusive target is locating the headquarters of a ‘third-layer,’ a term coined by Chandler in our interviews.<sup>28</sup> The third layer, as I understand it, is a space colored with the ROYGBIV of simultaneity in spectral light. Chandler describes it as apart from sex and gender, and as “...the permeable membrane of embodiment.”<sup>29</sup> I understand it to be a space wherein occupation becomes a fluid station of simultaneous imaginations. Further, I feel the third layer to be descriptive of an overall condition of simultaneity that provokes a sensation of manic

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<sup>26</sup> Katherine Bradford, *The Best Little Whore House in Texas*, The Best Little Whore House in Texas, December 24, 2015, section goes here, accessed September 18, 2016, <https://thecolorhour.com/caroline-chandler/>.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds or Erotohistriography*, In: Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), pg. 160.

<sup>28</sup> Caroline Wells Chandler, *A Conversation of Queer Aesthetics with Caroline Wells Chandler*, online interview by author, November 26, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

impossibility; an inessential essence of mystery.<sup>30</sup> It runs like a sub-electrical undercurrent through the entire field of perception relative to my experience and art practice. The Third Layer is the lynchpin of my theoretical defense. It is the sterling motivation behind everything I make. The purpose of this thesis is the story of the Third Layer's escape from paradox into the diaspora of multiplication – an invisibly bound utopia located nowhere in time.

## THE SUBLIME

My work negotiates the queer romance of the sublime. Most Western ideas concerning the sublime are informed by Kant. I will focus on aspects of his theory based on my own locus of sublimity as evinced in my painting practice. Following Kant, I briefly touch upon Jean-François Lyotard's (1924-1998) reading of the Kantian Sublime, the 'Gothic Sublime' of contemporary scholar Vijay Mishra (b. 1945). Finally, I will use Jay Garfield's translation to illustrate a notion of the sublime relative to Buddhist emptiness theory as it stems from *The Mūlamadhyamakārikā* written by Nāgārjuna. Though Buddhism of the second-century did not label the sublime, it regards worldly phenomena in a similar manner. I find Buddhist and Kantian notions of the immeasurable phenomenal realm to be similar in their approach, yet different regarding human action in relation to morality. This Buddhist reading of the sublime will hence be Frankensteined with Queer Theory. I will explain the appropriate concepts from Muñoz, Halberstam, P.L.O.G.S.<sup>31</sup> and my personal interviews with Caroline Wells Chandler as they relate to this theoretical defense. Effectively, I'm hoping to arrive at an explanation of the sublime that is rooted in a curated historiographical understanding.

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<sup>30</sup> An essence I assert later as being in fact empty of essence, and thereby descriptive of the 'Empty Sublime.'

<sup>31</sup> As noted in footnote 22 this refers to the text *Pink Labor on Golden Streets*.



*Merriam Webster* defines the sublime as being “grand or noble in thought, expression, or manner, as in sublime truths, or, beautiful or impressive enough to rouse a feeling of admiration or wonder as in sublime scenery.”<sup>32</sup> This feels soft and phony. The sublime was left upon me like a scar from early experiences with traumatic night tremors from as early as memory serves, until my early teens. In my personal stock of thresholds regarding sensation and feeling, nothing else surpasses my tremors; it’s tremors or fuck all. I would become another person. I would be possessed, yowling nonsense about afflictions from within nightmares. Sometimes my father shook me awake. Often, a drink of water was all it took. I don’t remember all of them or exactly how many, but they were always brought on by fever, or the cultural shock experienced in traveling abroad. I had the privilege of visiting seventeen different European countries before I was twenty. Until age fourteen I was pretty much guaranteed to have a night tremor at least once across the duration of our travels. I remember guests in several bed and breakfast dining rooms staring at me for having woken everyone the night before; the last occurred in the Icelandic countryside.<sup>33</sup>

Part of what made my night tremors so horrible was that I could not wake up, I was stuck inside the nightmare. Sometimes I would be firmly locked inside sleep, while other times I would drift in and out, momentarily interacting with my surroundings in actual physical space. Once I said to my brother, “Can I have your obit. so I can eat it? When is Mom coming home? Damn it!,” after which I ran frantically downstairs to the couch and curled into the fetal position.

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<sup>32</sup> *Merriam Webster*, s.v. *Definition of Sublime for Students (adjective)*, definition 1 & 2, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sublime>.

<sup>33</sup> If you’ve had night tremors you know what I’m talking about. If you haven’t had them yourself perhaps you’ve heard of them from a friend or someone you know. I’ve often heard them compared to episodes of sleep paralysis. In any event their terror is pure.

My brother, at this point well accustomed to dealing with my episodes, called for my dad, which for some reason I can remember. They brought me water which I refused: “If I drink it dry lips will grow out of the back of my head.” I visualized a pair of lips, emphatically grotesque, as if cast in bronze, growing from the pure, pale, white nape of my neck.

In the night tremor I remember as most chilling, two swells of shadows promised each other escalating blind notions of murder with speechless words in a space of lightless gloom. As their bulbous black bulks bobbed back and forth, a pile of coins multiplied between them. As they grew, so did the pile of coins, and my vantage rose with them into nothing most profound. Their voices shouted without words about the pile of coins and the number 99.99, about a destiny that couldn’t manifest, and an amount that could not breach its own qualification. I could feel their shouting as if they were trying to enter my cranium with hungry inhuman fingers. In all my night tremors the terror of insanity became palpable through unspoken languages of immensity and massive dark movements I still cannot comprehend. I write about what happened but words cannot claim those sensations. These sensations are however where I pin my personal reasoning of the sublime. As a child, I often wondered why we are here and how I came to be. I would shut my eyes and imagine the whole of existence snuffed out. Grappling with vastness, my night tremors terrifically expressed what I perceived as the entropy and great metaphysical impossibility of life. To this day I feel gripped by these impossible sensations, and know, like I know my own name, that there is no making them real for anyone else, not through any conventional device we know. It is from the sensational incomprehensibility felt within the frantic hell screams of my night tremors that I paint pictures.

## THE KANTIAN SUBLIME

My discussion of Kant is herein informed by his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Paul Crowther's (b.1953) *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art* (1989), and sections of *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* by Melissa McBay Merritt (b. 1972), and also by Paul Guyer (b.1948).

The Kantian Sublime is without objects; it is a transferrable quality which we infer as a human construct. Kant holds that the Sublime is a state of mind, first as a qualitative substance in nature or art that arouses pleasure distinguished by a subtle fear or pain.<sup>34</sup> The sublime is an innate rational modality of the human animal, taking pleasure in the irrational imagination of danger, and is required for an adequate morality. In Kant's mathematical sublime, perception must be ruled by measurement; therefore, things perceived immeasurable become sublime only through approximation to our imagination. For Kant, this is a function of reason.<sup>35</sup> Further, the sublime can be understood 'dynamically,' that is, being of great power inspiring fear. For instance, the sublime is aroused when we behold the ocean as a force that could drown, but is simultaneously awesome to behold. The sublime within us is an ability to stand before powers lethal as the ocean and not run in fear. Merritt writes:

The most basic epistemological lesson of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that theoretical knowledge is limited to objects of possible experience: we cannot have theoretical

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<sup>34</sup> Melissa McBay Merritt, *The Moral Source of the Kantian Sublime*, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Timothy M. Costelloe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 38-39.

knowledge about the supersensible. Hence we cannot determine that God exists, that the soul is immortal, or that the will is really free.<sup>36</sup>

This notion is important if I am to accept Kant's sublime, but I do not find belief in God to be logically tenable. Meritt contends that Kant's theory of the sublime is rooted in morality:<sup>37</sup> "Kant's mature view, by contrast, is that our capacity to appreciate the sublime in nature is grounded in the development of sound moral disposition."<sup>38</sup> Meritt further explains that for Kant, the human ability to rationalize and stay the sublime without being overwhelmed with exhaustion belongs to persons with a stable moral disposition.

It is important to state, with finality, that Kant believes a stable sense of morality is necessary in order to approach the sublime, and the only measure that can be subjectively perceived is all of nature at once, a feat that Kant determines to be impossible.<sup>39, 40</sup>

The feeling of the sublime is...at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgment of the inadequacy of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 40-41.

<sup>37</sup> This point of view is further sustained by Paul Crowther who I'll discuss forthwith.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Crowther, *Kant's Aesthetic of the Sublime : From the Preliminary Sections to the Mathematical Mode*, in *The Kantian Sublime from Morality to Art*(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 99.

<sup>40</sup> We'll find later on that Nāgarjuna agrees.

<sup>41</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, section 27, p.106, quoted in Paul Crowther, *Kant's Aesthetic of the Sublime: From the Preliminary Sections to the Mathematical Mode*, in *The Kantian Sublime from Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 99.

Crowther elaborates that humans are set apart by our supersensible rationale, independent of natural causality; morality is inherently within us. He goes on to imply our encounters with formlessness are only estimated in relation to the abstract idea of infinity – of which imagination falls totally short, producing displeasure. However, in rebound, our inability to measure totality by the imagination reinforces reason as enduring. This process in effect is incredibly similar to Kant's procession of morality and infers that the sublime is partial to it. Eventually the sublime leads to greater morality through sublime experience. This understanding is defined by a duality that Crowther calls the *baroque* and *austere* theses: on one hand, we seek to measure infinity (baroque), and on the other, realize imagination's shortcoming in satisfying reason. We are unable to totally regard any object as a whole (austere). Regarding the latter, Crowther reprimands Kant for not considering that any small object might suggest infinity, that it might *seem* infinite.<sup>42</sup> In his discussion of the mathematical sublime Crowther takes Kant to task for dismissing the infinitely small parts of whole objects and where Kant dismisses our imagining of the tiny; art portends these mysteries with agility, and even importance.<sup>43</sup>

Whereas Kant's mathematical sublime is harsh in limit, his dynamical sublime seems to be an unbridled space of flourishing human ego, and less digestible than the mathematical. The dynamical sublime most basically posits a situation where our smallness informs projections of morality against objects capable of overwhelming us.

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<sup>42</sup> Emptiness theory would contend similarly, arguing that the space of creativity matters little given that all things are without essence.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Crowther, *Kant's Aesthetic of the Sublime: From the Preliminary Sections to the Mathematical Mode*, in *The Kantian Sublime from Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 107.

Essentially, our rational mind keeps us from diving off a cliff; morality preserves itself.<sup>44</sup> Kant supposes we conquer abstract ideas of the infinite through reason and morality in this way. Though he may be well noted for establishing the position of subjective experience and arguing that God cannot be proven, Kant still manages traces of religiosity, or the moral bearings of Christianity throughout his writing. Moreover, he imagines a reality typified by a relatively even moral bearing upheld by society. In my own imaginings of the sublime (through night tremors) it has always been true that my personal morality never wins out. Where Kant renders the sublime under the dominion of human consciousness within reason, Buddhist Emptiness asserts a boundless infinity whereby the reality of convention (typical human perception) comes apart, completely dissolving essence of all phenomenal objects. It is beyond this coming apart that perception as we know it, cannot grasp. Instead of approaching Emptiness Theory brashly I'd like to meet in the middle.

In Lyotard's *The Sublime and the Avant-Garde* (1988) he describes the temporally untenable in painting:

*The Sublime is Now but as Now the Sublime is Like This.* Not elsewhere, not up there or over there, not earlier or later, not once upon a time. But as here, now, it happens that, and it's this painting. Here and now there is this painting, rather than nothing, and that's what is sublime. Letting go of all grasping intelligence and of its power, disarming it, recognizing that this occurrence of painting was not necessary and is scarcely foreseeable, a privation in the face of *Is it happening?*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>45</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Sublime and the Avant-Garde*//1988, in *The Sublime*, ed. Simon Morley, (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), 30.

Lyotard contends that the scope of avant-garde art, from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism, approached the Sublime through mimesis; insisting that an oversaturation of mechanically produced beauty forced art of the cutting edge to assume the grotesque, thus appropriating the Kantian Sublime in formlessness. Remember, the formless is an emanation of the infinite which intimidates us and calls on reason to lead us to morality. When beauty is dictated by the neoliberal capitalist machine, as suggested by Lyotard, beauty is on the run, and morality is outmoded by commodity.<sup>46</sup> Further, for Vijay Mishra's *Gothic Sublime*, abstraction is ostensibly the camp of the sublime, imbibing death (or death-drive "the nirvāna instinct"), or propensity for the future and becomingness, desire motivated by what you don't have.<sup>47</sup> Later on, this propensity for death, what Freud referred to as "the Death Drive," will be central. Mishra defines the Gothic Sublime as the struggle of willpower against a repression of death, essentially that the sublime is our ego facing death at a distance. Mishra decodes the quality of the sublime that I know best:

In the final analysis this is the terror of the sublime, the frighteningly contaminative force of the impossible idea itself. To collocate with the sublime, to cohabit with it, is to be faced with an instance of radical incommensurability. Of all the sublimes, the Gothic sublime (in this specific collocation/cohabitation) is most aware of this incommensurability and the inherent problems of self-transcendence.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 30-35

<sup>47</sup> Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (1994), in *The Sublime*, ed. Simon Morley, (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), 151.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 153-54.

The sublime effectively seems an infinite permutation, stalemate of simultaneity, of being and not, of death once removed by what we cannot prove of God, and transcendence with tongues bound by language. “For the Gothic there is no such thing as the aesthetics of the beautiful, there is only the superabundance of the sublime [...],” Mishra states.<sup>49</sup> Mishra’s interpretation of the Kantian Sublime via Lyotard, displaces notions of beauty because of mechanization. Man, having conquered the sublime through a tireless projection of ego, has effectively destroyed beauty and castrated the independence of aesthetics by becoming a paradox – spliced like rogue RNA from the spiral helix of the sublime. This theory of the Gothic Sublime finds comfy kin with Guy Debord’s (1931-1994) *La Société Du Spectacle* (1967).<sup>50</sup> Debord’s theory interprets our society’s current state of affairs through the entropic transmogrification of Capitalism and the global market. His device is as thoroughly diamond-like as what it describes, and can be observed on nearly any page in its death march cadence of sequential short sections. For instance, the following:

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something added to the real world, not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality. In all its specific manifestations news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life. It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice. In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the permanent presence of that justification, for it governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Vijra Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (1994), in *The Sublime*, ed. Simon Morley (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 151.

<sup>50</sup> Guy Debord and Ken Knabb, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, Section 6.



If the utterly self-sufficient cannibal dynamism of the market is more immediately sublime than nature and the cosmos, what solution is there to discuss? The market, as an abstract ether that surrounds our every movement, fits the paradigm of the formless, and toxic maternal – from it we take sustenance and an abridged sense of fear. We are utterly complacent, we are utterly overwhelmed. Effectively, our society enacts an ouroboroeal sublime exercise in sensational magic of the spectacles’ terrific motions in obsolescence.<sup>52</sup>

From this seemingly untenable checkmate in the philosophical game I turn to the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* written in India in the second century CE by a Buddhist saint called Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – c. 250 CE). The title translates to *The Fundamental Wisdom of The Middle Way*. This text, as well as all Buddhist Philosophies, are frequently discounted in Western scholarship as nihilistic.<sup>53</sup> This is not without good reason; Buddhist philosophy maintains an ultimate reality beyond our conventional understanding wherein all things cease. However, as we’ll find, it also maintains that reality is in fact very real but only from the conventional perspective. In the next section I will unpack the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* through Jay Garfield’s translation and seek to provide space for the alternate and empty sublime attempting to subvert The Gothic Sublime, and its post-modern trappings. The Kantian Sublime, subtracted of its projections based in reason and morality, is mostly agreeable when read against the Emptiness of Nagarjuna.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, section 70.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Barzun, *The Artist as Prophet and Jester*, *American Scholar* 69, no. 1 (2000): 17, accessed September 30, 2017, Ebsco Host, Art and Architecture Source.

## THE EMPTY SUBLIME

I find the formlessness explained in the Kantian Sublime through Buddhist Emptiness Theory, approached without the projection of ego, as stemming from Kant's dialectic. By including Buddhist emptiness theory, I incorporate a very personal ingredient to the Frankenstein I am building. I first read the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* during my sophomore year at Guilford College during a seminar in Buddhist Emptiness Theory taught by Professor Eric Mortensen. On the final day of class, we were asked to raise our hands if we saw ourselves taking ideas of the empty beyond the context of the class and then explain why. I was the only one who raised a hand. Many classmates said they felt beholden to their own religions, ties of attachment to close friends and family, and perhaps held ideas pertaining to a general respect and affinity for progress and the human experiment. It is not my aim to approach Nāgārjuna's theory of Emptiness with an attitude of self-belonging in Buddhism. As it pertains to this instance, I like to think I had the wool pulled off my eyes at a very young age. Though I very much enjoy reading Buddhist philosophy, I was raised Episcopalian, attended Jesus Camp enthusiastically for five summers during my teenage years, and ultimately decided after enduring much brainwashing that contemporary Christianity is an abysmal irony. Many Christians directly defy behaviors the Bible condones. If I were to describe myself religiously, I would express casual affinity for aspects of Quakerism and Buddhism, though I am no member of the clergy nor the sangha.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Both terms for religious laity in Quakerism and Buddhism respectively.

Both traditions are concerned with compassion, meditation as divine experience, stewardship of natural resources, consensus process, respect for sentient life forms, and disdain for greed.<sup>55</sup>

However, I do not actively believe in God or God-like entities, so it is problematic for me to speak about Nāgārjuna as Buddhists absolutely identify him as a saint of supernatural mythologies.<sup>56</sup> I find these mythologies easily separated from the central meanings heavily laid in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. I do not count myself a knowledgeable practitioner, and seek to avoid false appropriation of a culture which I ultimately cannot claim through upbringing. My encounter with Buddhist philosophies has been strictly through scholarship.

Jay Garfield (b.1955) is widely regarded as an expert of Tibetan Buddhism. He is a Professor of Religious Studies at Smith College, a Visiting Professor of Buddhist Philosophy at Harvard Divinity School, Professor of Philosophy at Melbourne University, and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at the Central University of Tibetan Studies. Garfield's translation is one of two Nāgārjuna related *Madhyamika* texts we read when I encountered the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* in Mortensen's class at Guilford. Garfield's translation is from a previous Tibetan translation in Sanskrit. Garfield's text provides a reading reflective of "...an Indo-Tibetan Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika interpretation."<sup>57</sup> Further, his efforts are in service of

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<sup>55</sup> The path of the artist, as I view it, is a station in life that finds natural semblance with the dogma of either tradition. We must work together, be resourceful, and take care of each other. It has been my experience that people on their way up often turn around to extend a helping hand.

<sup>56</sup> I certainly don't intend to demean belief in magic, shamanism, mythology, or any efficacious religious practice, Catholicism included. I find religious practices of every sort to be fascinating and in my brief affairs with religious scholarship, found it productive to approach each religion by relinquishing judgments of world view, societal norms, and efficacy. I have often thought of religions as institutional casinos where dice of trial and error are rolled against terrible odds in attempt to win good fortune and benevolent afterlives.

<sup>57</sup> Nagarjuna and Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Introduction viii-ix.

“Western philosophers.”<sup>58</sup> I have chosen Garfield’s text for this reason. The original text encourages discussions of its meaning, this quality of openness, a thorough engagement of counterarguments, and Buddhist rhetoric.<sup>59</sup> I personally find it to be one of the most impactful books I have been privileged to study.

Characterizing the style of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is important because it doesn’t lend itself to typical mannerisms of scripture with which Westerners may be familiar. It is not a scripture of stories, it is one of openly argued logic. Yet, it is also very conversational, encouraging critical readership; the text demands heavy lifting. The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is part poetry, part critical examination of phenomenal reality. Emptiness theory is a very reductive practice. Nāgārjuna opens with the below dedication; providing a poetic atmosphere maintained henceforth, and foreshadows the text’s definitive stupefaction whereby Nāgārjuna uses the exact same sequences of phrases. Reiterated in a thickened context, they deliver a whammy of understanding, obviating further frustration.

I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha,  
The best of teachers, who taught that  
Whatever is dependently arisen is  
Unceasing, unborn,  
Unannihilated, not permanent,  
Not coming, not going,  
Without distinction, without identity,  
And free from conceptual construction.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Indo-Tibetan Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika designates the geography and sect of Buddhist belief we are dealing with. Many sects of Buddhist belief have been decided and fissured based on competing interpretations of this text.

<sup>59</sup> Nagarjuna and Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Introduction viii-ix.

<sup>60</sup> Nagarjuna and Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). 2.

Nāgārjuna sets about the logical pursuit of Emptiness.<sup>61</sup> He does so rhythmically, and repetitively, under the aegis of tetralemmas – attributes woven around conditional statements, considering circumstances where certain types of phenomena are supposed to have essence. The logic of a tetralemma follows as such: It is, it is not, it both is and is not, it neither is nor isn't (affirmation, negation, both, neither). Each circumstance is debased sequentially around a framework of belief surrounding the meditational path, weaving a rhetorical dragnet. Nāgārjuna wields this fourfold negation with great skill. Explaining every philosophical dissection of the text would not be productive, instead, I will attend to what I consider the most penetrating chapters. It is both a guide for beholding reality, and a path toward its cessation or Nirvāna – built around a polarity of perceptions, and a position of simultaneity regarding their binary. It is, thereby, the middle way, centered about 'the two truths.'<sup>62</sup>

8.  
 The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma  
 Is based on two truths:  
 A truth of worldly convention  
 And an ultimate truth...  
 10.  
 Without a foundation in the conventional truth,  
 The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.  
 Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,  
 Liberation is not achieved.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Logical is here meant in the mathematical sensibility of deductive reasoning in ontology.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>63</sup> Nagarjuna and Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). 68.

So, conventional understanding is reality as we know it, and the ultimate understanding of reality is liberation from conventional understanding, although neither have any essence; we cannot have one without the other, they are dependently arisen.

8.  
Everything is real and is not real,  
Both Real and not real,  
Neither real nor not real.  
This is Lord Buddha's teaching.<sup>64</sup>

This, Garfield proffers, is a positive tetralemma regarding selfhood and existence.

Everything is conventionally real. Everything is ultimately unreal...Everything has both characteristics—that is, everything is conventionally real and ultimately unreal. Nothing is ultimately real or completely nonexistent. That is, everything is neither real in one sense nor not-real in another sense.<sup>65</sup>

Much of logic herein follows the age-old question of which came first, the chicken or egg?

Objects of natural phenomena are effectively empty of essence because there is literally nothing that raises meaning without referring to another for its quality of difference. No sum object is irreducible of its parts. This is shown to be irrefutable given our position in conventional reality;

Garfield asserts this section to be the text's "philosophical heart."<sup>66</sup> In his *Examination of the Four Noble Truths* Nāgārjuna deduces.

18.  
Whatever is dependently co-arisen  
That is explained to be emptiness.  
That, being a dependent designation,  
Is itself the middle way.  
19.  
Something that is not dependently arisen,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>66</sup> The Four Noble Truths are the most basic tenants of Buddhism: ordinary life brings about suffering, suffering originates from attachments, the cessation of this suffering is possible, the eightfold path is the way.

Such a thing does not exist.  
Therefore a nonempty thing  
Does not exist.<sup>67</sup>

In the final verse of his *Examination of The Four Noble Truth's*, Nāgārjuna hands me a wily notion. I believe he effectively gives cosmic corporeality to the Sublime, albeit unintentionally. Whereas Kant maintained, like Nāgārjuna, a certain formlessness of the sublime, Nāgārjuna, in refuting a formed sublime, imagines an immutable world where objects do not arise or cease, but where their essences exist with great singular annunciations. Because they have essence, they are robbed of impermanence and thus the ability to change, thereby rendered static and unchanging: “The entire phenomenal world would be immutable.”<sup>68</sup> In many ways I believe that artists often strive to distill this phenomenal immutability. The crux of the chapter is that all things lack essence, emptiness included, and cannot inherently exist. This allows them to change: “So nothing lacks the three coextensive properties of emptiness, dependent-origination, and conventional identity.”<sup>69</sup> The most critical aspect of Nāgārjuna’s dialectic regarding the truths is that emptiness must also be empty for any of this to hold. Identifying emptiness as itself empty, is herein a marker of it being dependently arisen, and thereby beholden to an identity qualifier. This qualifier is necessitated by our conventional understanding, rooted in language, for which need would cease in ultimate understanding – perceptible phenomena necessitates many parts, for their understanding is precisely what debases their essence. Lastly, regarding the two truths (the conventional and the ultimate), perceptible phenomena are conventionally real and

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<sup>67</sup> ,Nagarjuna and Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). 69.

<sup>68</sup> Nagarjuna and Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). 72.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 308.

ultimately unreal, and these are the same thing. Garfield supposes that this is possible because emptiness is not separate of dependent arising, and is itself empty of essence.<sup>70</sup> This position of simultaneity, centered about the dual truth of conventional and ultimate reality will be redeployed in my discussion of what I understand via fellow painter Caroline Wells Chandler as the third layer. Before we depart Nāgārjuna, it is important to discuss the ceased plain of nirvāna.

In his *Examination of Nirvāna*, Nāgārjuna, reiterates the same words of dedication that begin the book.

3.  
Unrelinquished, unattained,  
Unannihilated, not permanent,  
Unarisen, unceased:  
This is how nirvāna is described.<sup>71</sup>

The negativity of the above predicate implies there is no literal truth of nirvāna for Nāgārjuna. Suggesting such would place nirvāna in an ultimate light, as existent and inherently determinate of itself, thereby proclaiming essence. Hallowed as nirvāna may be, it can only ever be contrasted against the ordinary qualities of this conventional plain. It is importantly remembered that once conventional reality is left behind, transcendence is total, asserting one thing against another would be impossible. Conventional terms have no bearing or meaning for the ultimate. Hence, to speak of things conventionally as being of the ultimate does not convey anything but the complete lack of understanding therein.<sup>72</sup> After a cycle of conditionally dependent and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 321.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 324.



interwoven tetrallemmas concerning the nature of nirvāṇa, Nāgārjuna dissolves the idea of the ultimate inside the conventional. It cannot be held by language in any sense.

22.  
Since all existents are empty,  
What is finite or infinite?  
What is finite and infinite?  
What is neither finite nor infinite?
23.  
What is identical and what is different?  
What is permanent and what is impermanent?  
What is both permanent and impermanent?  
What is neither?
24.  
The pacification of all objectification  
And the pacification of illusion:  
No Dharma was taught by the Buddha  
At any time, in any place, to any person.<sup>73</sup>

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With this final passage Nāgārjuna renders divine aspects of Buddhism as being empty.

Nāgārjuna separates the spiritual figureheads of the tradition from its most central goals.

Effectively this erases any quality of nirvāṇa from the Buddha, asserting their mutual exclusivity.

Instead of the ultimate equating to any semblance of a bodied individual, or akin to a summit that one climbs, it is a manner of exchange with nonbeings by nonbeings.<sup>74</sup>

The remaining two chapters are a call to mindfulness, cessation, and effectively non-doing through “exploitation of the cycle.”<sup>75</sup> *Examination of Views* concludes the

*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* with the following.

29.  
So, because all entities are empty,  
which views of permanence, etc., would occur,  
And to whom, when, why, and about what

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 334.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 342.

Would they occur at all?  
30.  
I prostrate to Gautama  
Who through compassion  
Taught the true doctrine,  
Which leads to the relinquishing of all views.<sup>76</sup>

The text, both the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and Garfield's commentary, end by admitting that in ultimate reality there would be nothing written, all being relinquished. "Even the emptiness of emptiness is empty...."<sup>77</sup> So, where, or where not, I derive a quality of my sublime from Emptiness is in the two truths—or really the space reached between them, or from where they are apart: the simultaneous existence of conventional reality and nonexistence of ultimate reality, and the latter's indifference for the former.<sup>78</sup> This simultaneity is the unspeakable feeling that provokes me to complicate pictures with ferocious paint. This quality of simultaneity is something I find in my night tremors. I find it in my sex life. I find it in my genderedness. Importantly, I find it in queer theory, which leads to my discussion of Jose Esteban Muñoz's, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, wherein I discovered horizon as a substrate comprising many ideas for which I feel affinity.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 359.

<sup>78</sup> The two truths are conventional and ultimate reality. Theoretically speaking, having reached the latter there would be no notion of the former because all cognitive constructs, or even the notion of a body, are thereafter purported to fall away. To try to speak of ultimate reality is false, nonsense in and of itself.

## THE HORIZON

*Cruising Utopia, The Then and There of Queer Futurity* by the late José Esteban Muñoz was a life changing reading event. Through conversations with creative queer peers and current readings, I understand this is true for many. Muñoz has been particularly important to queer communities of color. The opening four sentences of *Cruising Utopia* came like a psychedelic song of deliverance, lifting the weight of my heavy queer secret. In many ways, it reminds me of how I feel saved by rock n' roll. Muñoz writes:

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*.<sup>79</sup>

When I first read Muñoz, I was painting desirous pictures. I was moved to make landscapes by travels across Texas to visit my then-lover. The sections of land along I-35 between Corpus Christi and San Antonio became projection surfaces for anticipation. The first landscapes I made such as *Many Roads to Follow Beneath the Texas Moon* (Fig.1) or *Bloodlights* (Fig. 2), feature large expanses of land and extremely bright colors. The mark-making style I used was repeating and evocative of both anxiety and ecstasy. Eventually, to my dismay, the relationship upon which the work seemed centered ended. The paintings did not; they could not. In fact, it became clear I had not been making work

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<sup>79</sup> José Esteban. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*(New York: New York University Press, 2009). 1.

about the relationship at all. Shortly thereafter I jumped into another that screwed me up twice as bad anyway. Around this time, despite the bad getting worse in my love life, I found an artistic community of queers, although at the time I didn't realize it. In a way community found me. Looking backward it's easy to see this revealing itself in my work. Through Instagram I became acquainted with Katherine Bradford. She commented on a small painting called *Maniac Hundred Shine* (Fig. 3) depicting a backwards silhouette of Texas flying above a lighted roadway, careening out of a twilight horizon replete with manic dabs of garish colors. She suggested that Caroline Wells Chandler ought to own it, so we ended up making a trade. In return for my painting I received one of Chandler's marvelous crocheted figures entitled *Little Hermes* (Fig. 4) in 2015. At 32" x 24" it was anything but small. When we met in New York in May of 2017, Chandler explained *Little Hermes* was to function as a studio guide. The cactus wielded with jolly gesture acts as a tuning fork or divining rod, used to evaluate new works in my studio practice. Upon our trade, he agreed to become the subject of a research project, *Crocheting Utopia* (2016), and later we became friends.

Chandler exposed my practice to his method of alchemically derived and self-ordained cosmology. He often discusses his work as being in communication with interstellar demons, which in his case manifest as the Insane Clown Posse of an alternate dimension.<sup>80</sup> Chandler describes his queer crocheted figure paintings as "bois," a terminology connoting gender transgression in either direction, perhaps toward and

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<sup>80</sup> Emily Burns, *Caroline Wells Chandler*, Maake Magazine, 2016, accessed September 18, 2016, <http://www.maakemagazine.com/caroline-wells-chandler/>.

through the third layer of embodiment.<sup>81</sup> Caroline mentions that real-life personalities of his friend group, art history and queer mentorship often enter the work.<sup>82</sup> A myriad of figures take on cosmological personalities which he compares to the jovial, yet wrathful Dharma protectors of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>83</sup> “I kind of like to think of my figures in a similar way, as big queer jolly guardians that keep the edges free and flexy.”<sup>84</sup>

The more I examined Caroline’s work the more I loved it. I felt allowed to be queerly oriented, comfortable to begin identifying as queer, and came out more openly to my family, friends, and academic community. As I sought to express what I was picking up from Chandler, I knew my work had to remain organically mine, that I couldn’t make his joy if I tried, nor should I strive to. I decided to follow common threads of affirmative community, queer futurity, perpetual mutation, and the third layer. I previously wrote of Caroline’s work:

Chandler opts for a feminism that doesn’t “...value or respect denominator cultural values...”<sup>85</sup> but instead “...the life affirming positive choice...”<sup>86</sup> Chandler’s attitude of feminism is more characterized by the affirmative inclusivity of its insides than the exclusivity of its outsides. Importantly, lived experience and unconditional affirmation would seem central.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Jillian Steinhauer, *Crocheting a Queer Vision of Art History*, Hyperallergic RSS, February 24, 2016, accessed September 18, 2016, <http://hyperallergic.com/276810/caroline-wells-chandler/>.

<sup>82</sup> Emily Burns, *Caroline Wells Chandler*, Maake Magazine, 2016, section goes here, accessed September 18, 2016, <http://www.maakemagazine.com/caroline-wells-chandler/>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Katherine Bradford, *The Best Little Whore House in Texas*, December 24, 2015, accessed September 18, 2016, <https://thecolorhour.com/caroline-chandler/>.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

This evenness of queer strata in affirmative worlding<sup>88</sup> is something I try to employ in my work. You might think of it as a general friendliness, a radical inclusivity that seeks anti-ethics, a completely serious ethos of hugs and smiles. These politics of affirmation are necessarily couched in queer time. As with Muñoz, Judith Halberstam formulates a forward momentum in her work *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. Halberstam contends that notions of straight time, or married time, are geared toward capital devotion: there is a time and place for everything, time is money, no one likes waiting in line, and on time is fifteen minutes early. These directives are woven into our social fabric and dictate our daily lives, creating self-consciousness about choices we make in relation to money.<sup>89</sup> According to Halberstam, however, queer lifestyles and queer temporality are characterized by many different people in postmodernity opting for lives outside of heteronormative time structures centered around the family. These queer temporalities defy the logic of living for money and are instead judged by risk. This choice of “queer subjects” is deliberate and counter-opposed to straight time. Queer subjects go to work while normativity sleeps in the spaces they have abandoned. The risk artists take in pursuit of creation despite a certain, and maybe necessary desperation in the

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<sup>88</sup> “Worlding was first popularized by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927). He turned the noun (world) into the active verb (worlding), a gerundive and generative process of world making, world becoming and (as he puts it) world ‘bringing-near.’ For Heidegger, worlding is always meaning giving and already ongoing (i.e. never not worlding); worlding is how we experience a world as familiar; worlding is a determination of Dasein’s being (wherein the world belongs to Dasein’s existential constitution); worlding offers measurable standards of being (both authentic and inauthentic); and worlding is an ongoing process of the thinging world.” Stephen Petrina and Franc Feng, “Worlding,” *How We Learn Media Technology*, September 12, 2012, accessed November 29, 2017, <https://blogs.ubc.ca/hwlm/2012/09/12/worlding/>.

<sup>89</sup> David Harvey, in, *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990. Quoted in, Judith Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 7.

capital realm, is outside the structured safeguards of normativity. Effectively, the life of the artist is not normative and can thereby be extrapolated as queer.<sup>90</sup>

Halberstam also contends that “...Queers participate in subcultures far longer than their heterosexual counterparts.”<sup>91</sup> In my personal experience I find this to be true. Whereas many of my friends from high school and college are marrying, reproducing, buying houses, and engaging in other typical heteronormative productions of capitalism, I’m spending fourteen hours a day in the studio and money on art supplies, application fees, and art books. Halberstam contends that queer subcultural participation distends the barrier between youth and adulthood, sometimes extending adolescence past middle age.<sup>92</sup> Halberstam further asserts that subcultural venues, described as ‘counterpublics’ are important to unhinging straight time and socialized methods of relational being within the greater fabric of the social world. Within these counterpublics, subcultural goers may “...model other modes of being and becoming that scramble our understandings of place, time, development, action and transformation.”<sup>93</sup> I remember when Danny Sapperstein took me to visit his home in Washington D.C. in 2009. Before we even dropped our bags off with his parents we were headed to see the all-womxn,<sup>94</sup> queer punk band Turboslut at the Corpse Fortress, which closed in 2011.<sup>95</sup> I had never been to a

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<sup>90</sup> Judith Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 186.

<sup>94</sup> Womxn is a spelling derived of the popular feminist consciousness of the moment in which this text is being written.

<sup>95</sup> Benjamin R. Freed, *Hardcore DIY Venue Gets the Boot*, Washington City Paper, August 26, 2011, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/arts/music/blog/13076192/hardcore-diy-venue-gets-the-boot>.

real punk show before, not at a grimy DIY space anyway, and I was very intimidated. We stood awkwardly at the back of the basement looking out of place amongst the sea of bodies clad in green, black and brown, while Turboslut sound-checked. Suddenly the crowded basement swelled as Beck Levy, the band's frontwomxn, screamed "GRRRLLLLLS to the FRONT!" at the top of her lungs before exploding into a minute-and-a-half hardcore explosion. I was beer soaked that night with something completely strange and new; suddenly neck deep in a subculture, and I quickly fell in love.

Subcultures, and queerness have provided a retreating substratum for the projectile visualization of my own self-orienting through art. In his discussion of relationality Muñoz expounds upon the idea of French Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and his idea of "singular plural." The idea states that entities only have qualities of difference insofar as they are relational to other qualifiers of difference had by other entities. Muñoz supposes that should queerness be shot through this lens, it need be both anti-relational and relational.<sup>96</sup> What I understand is that queerness need be dependently arisen, deriving of its difference from others, and through this must be realized as only conventionally real, and therefore empty. The third layer similarly obliterates binary through the embodiment of a third option of joy-forward exercises in freak-what-you-feel politics. This third layer might be a fairy-tale. In Muñoz's discussion of Fred Herko's (1936-1964) final, suicidal performance, wherein he danced out of a fifth story New York apartment window, Muñoz quotes German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977):

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<sup>96</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), Quoted in, José Esteban. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*(New York: New York University Press, 2009). 11.



[...] In contrast to folktale, which is always tied to a particular locale, the fairy tale remains unbound. Not only does the fairy tale remain as fresh as longing and love, but the evil demons that abound in fairy tales are still at work in the present, and the happiness of “once upon a time,” which is even more abundant in the fairy tale, still affects our visions of the future.<sup>97</sup>

Muñoz elaborates:

Herko’s performance practice, like Bloch’s fairy tale, “narrates a wish-fulfillment which is not bound by its own time and the apparel of its contents,” and this ‘unboundedness’ interrupts what I have described, after Halberstam, as straight time, a naturalized temporality that is calibrated to make queer potentiality not only unrealized but also unthinkable. Indeed, the present is replete with beasts that need to be vanquished, which is to say that investing in a fairy tale need not be a retreat from reality but can be a certain way of facing it.<sup>98</sup>

The third layer is effectively a place of real transgressions in the fairy tales staged of real life, where the body, or the consciousness, becomes a free layer of embodiment, a substrate of transformation, heralding all the possibilities of make-believe, while existing in the (actual) breathed-in moment. Michele Foucault (1926-1986) typifies something similar in his essay *Utopian Body*, highlighted in *P.L.O.G.S.*, characterizing “the body without body as a site of utopia”:

Utopia is a place outside all places, but it is a place where I will have a body without body...Untethered, invisible, protected—always transfigured....The land of fairies, land of gnomes, of genies, magicians...It is the land where you’re visible when you want, invisible when you desire.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own Time*, in *Literary Essays*, trans. Andrew Joron and others (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 167, Quoted in José Esteban. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). 163.

<sup>98</sup> José Esteban. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). 165.

<sup>99</sup> Michel Foucault. *Utopian Body*. In *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*. Edited by Caroline A. Jones. Cited in, Barbara Paul, "Between 'Bodies without Bodies' and Body Landscapes, Queer Artistic Negotiations," in *Pink Labor on Golden*

In this description, it is easy to understand a simultaneity of the third layer – an imagination space – also of real transformations, where the body is frenetically discursive and interstation disappears in the preferences of a ceaseless pursuit of utopia. I equivocate utopia with the conventional discussion of nirvāṇa, the ultimate description which language cannot serve. It is the huge and formless infinity described by Kant. It is the object without object to which transcendence forever aspires. It is horizon without ending. It is a personhood of endless reflections and changes. It is a queerness circumscribed by speed so great as to only be identified as perpetual revolution. In the *Object Oriented Ontology* of Timothy Morton, it is the ever-retreating ‘hyperobject.’ In a recent interview Morton explains the following about Western consciousness its relationship with phenomenal reality.

There’s a meme we’ve been retweeting in the West for a very, very, very long time. It’s basically a theistic meme: the notion that “the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts.” There’s no good reason to think this. Think about the opposite: that the whole is weirdly less than the sum of its parts.<sup>100</sup>

With the idea of hyperobjects Morton names a locality contingent upon temporality and dependent arising close to what I am describing, or gleaning, in Chandler’s third layer.

The undulating temporality that hyperobjects emit bathes us in a spatiotemporal vortex that is radically different from human-scale time. The phasing of hyperobjects forcibly reminds us that we are not the measure of all things...And like a wafting theater curtain,

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*Streets: Queer Art Practices*, ed. Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwärlzler, Ruby Sircar, and Hans Scheirl (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 242.

<sup>100</sup>Timothy Morton and Sam Littlefair, *Groundbreaking Scholar Timothy Morton Wants Philosophers to Face Their Buddhaphobia*, *Lion's Roar Buddhist Wisdom for Our Time*, September 2, 2017, *Suffusing the Western theory of humanity with the Buddhist idea of emptiness*, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.lionsroar.com/groundbreaking-scholar-timothy-morton-wants-philosophers-to-face-their-buddhaphobia/>.

interobjectivity floats in front of objects, a demonic zone of threatening illusion, a symptom of the Rift between essence and appearance.<sup>101</sup>

The undulating temporality, and deceitful impression of interobjectivity, or simultaneity, is exactly what I seek to describe in my paintings – all we really know are retreating appearances that are dependent and empty of essence. The more you divide phenomena, the less you can actually know about them, and because of this, everything in the field of perception is without essence. I try to name these ideas in my paintings through the joy of vivid color and the suspended adolescent humor of queerness.

#### DISCUSSION OF THE WORK

As a nod to Muñoz, Howard Hodgkin (1932-2017) and ostensibly all other theorists discussed herein, my work for the past year (2017) has dealt almost exclusively with horizon, and the spatial depth of light during transitions of dawn and dusk. In what's written here and painted elsewhere: the only happening is me chasing the elusive, that which recedes and remains mysterious. I conceive the horizon simultaneously as a perfect expression of utopia on the run and a permanent becoming, inspired by the perpetual motion of dependent arising and emptiness (The sun is not carried through the sky in a chariot.) The interwoven conglomerate of these theoretical constructs has always suggested the very literal space of travel. In *About Hodgkin* Susan Sontag (1933-2004) beautifully describes the fluidity of his approach to painting.

In principle, the painter could make pictures out of everything he has lived through and done and seen. This creates an unbearably acute pressure to paint, and an equally acute feeling of anxiety. Travel, the impression that one has ventured outside oneself, can be used as a filter and goad. It organizes the desire to paint. It gives it a rhythm, and the right kind of delay. It is important not to see *too much*. (And there is nothing to reproduce.)

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<sup>101</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 196.

Hence, Hodgkin doesn't sketch, doesn't take photographs, doesn't do anything obvious to commit to memory the scene or an interior or a view or a face—instead trusting what will happen when the sight of something has burrowed itself deep down in memory, when it has accumulated emotional and pictorial gravity.<sup>102</sup>

Hodgkin's paintings, which were introduced to me in a lecture by painter Emil Robinson (b. 1984) (Fig. 5), are the most direct inspiration for nearly all the paintings I completed for my thesis. Hodgkin's work is very much concerned with the horizon and the idea of travel. There is also an unabashed grandiosity of pleasure. News of his death on Thursday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017 reached me as I began teaching my color theory class. Choking back tears, I tried to explain that one of the greats was gone. Although I had been under the impression that he was *already* long gone, discovering our timelines overlapped and I had majorly fucked up in not meeting him motivated me in the studio that night. I was standing on fertile ground, feeling a ripe message to communicate in colorful rites of frenzied painting. I wanted to make visual holy smoke for my hero.

Hodgkin's paintings like *Saturdays* (Fig. 6) had already informed works I was in the middle of exploring. I began the series, then unnamed and uncertain, after artist friend Jorge Alegría gave me twenty panels, all smooth and ready to go, after I had lusted over tiny pedestals we sanded together in the Art Museum of South Texas workshop. He supplied six panels at 8" x 11" and fourteen at 14" x 17". Both became major fixtures in the paintings comprising *Pretty Color Time* and *Meet Me At The Horizon*.

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<sup>102</sup> *About Hodgkin*, in *Howard Hodgkin: Paintings*, ed. Michael Auping, by Susan Sontag (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995).

## MEET ME AT THE HORIZON

The first six paintings of the series *Meet Me At The Horizon* were made in response to earlier paintings, in self-repair, and were heavily influenced by Hodgkin. They were painted before his death in the summer of 2016. Since then I capped the series at 126 works. They rely heavily on the Hodgkin's combination of complimentary colors employed in paintings such as *Bombay Sunset* (Fig.7) and *Prizeman's Perspective* (Fig. 8).

In many ways, horizon suddenly felt like a rescue ladder—pure abstraction—the call of a lighter world than the toxic relationship I dove into immediately following my landscape muse. It was a routine of nastiness circulating around deprecatory humor, constant criticism, and lots of gas lighting: everything seemed to be my fault. I was inadequate, I was a sociopath, I was a narcissist, I took everything for granted, I was too sensitive, not a good listener, and completely co-dependent. I was caught in a dark hetero love-trap. For my ship, lost at sea, horizons became the perpetual search for port. *Letter to Mimbis* (Fig. 9) is an early horizon painting, a trace of what I was trying to formulate. I made a gift of it to this person, and it is the only painting anyone has given back to me. Thereafter, in many ways, it became my map.

That summer, newly independent, emotionally addled and wayward, I traveled as much as I could. I went to New York City for the first time in three or more years. I most wanted to visit Loie Hollowell's (b.1983) studio. I read an article about her in *The New York Times* after acquainting with her work via Instagram. I knew I found someone special and needed to see her work in person. Her paintings channel the very best aesthetics of underappreciated modern and pre-modern women painters such as Georgia O'Keefe (1887-1986) and Hilma af Klint (1862-

1944).<sup>103</sup> Eerily, Martha Schwendener wrote the following about her work which I think defines this quality of the third layer:

...when so-called feminist imagery has been eclipsed by transgender and postgender arguments, and the celebrated “return of the figure” in painting feels like a remedial rejoinder. Ms. Hollowell offers a third option.<sup>104</sup>

Hollowell’s spitfieriness was palpable; she explained how everyone comes in and “wants to buy a pussy.” I wanted to learn how she crafts gradients out of paint, texture and sculpted surface and deeply wanted to describe the gradated sky. *Yellow Canyon Over Red Ground* (Fig. 10) was one of the paintings I saw in her studio. I asked how she made such incredible gradients and she simply answered “by hand.” I suggested I could achieve the same effects with a printmaking brayer and the technique of blendrolling. She challenged me: “do it then.”

My studio visit with Hollowell was another life changing event. I further understood the artistic practice and persona(?) of authentic freakiness. Loie had it, and was encouraging me to develop my own personal means (Fig. 11) I returned home to create artwork that would become a ladder to climb from the deep hole I dug for myself during a long and drawn-out breakup. The first painting of *Meet Me At The Horizon* was *That’s Why They Call You Detritus* (Fig. 12). The title is self-deprecating because at that time I fully believed I was not capable or deserving of love. Fortunately, this further validated ways in which I was irreparably queer and I began to embrace myself. As such, another of the first six paintings was titled *Every World an Orgin* (Fig. 13), unconsciously (origin changed to Orgin) after characters in Caroline Wells Chandler’s work

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<sup>103</sup> Martha Schwendener, *Loie Hollowell’s Abstract Body Landscape*, *The New York Times*, November 6, 2015, accessed November 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/arts/design/loie-hollowells-abstract-body-landscapes.html>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

‘Orgins’ (Fig. 14). Orgin’s vibrantly vague, rainbow-chasm nether regions reference Gustave Courbet’s (1819-1877) *Origin of the World* (1866) (Fig. 15) which is an utterly specific, cropped painting of a vagina. Interestingly, Orgins bodies echo the posture of the wrathful Buddhist dharma protectors.<sup>105</sup> This collision of worlds again seems an uncanny intersection of the third layer. After I completed my essay about Chandler’s work, *Crocheting Utopia*, published in AEQAI magazine, I realized I was seeking my own path, using titles as dedications. Caroline’s studio guide was working its magic.

In making reference to the work of artists I admire and emulate, undoubtedly Hodgkin is the painter to whom I pay the greatest homage. The day he died I went to my studio having decided not to leave until an epiphany had been negotiated. I kicked a piece of pink foam insulation across the room. Its straight edge made direct contact with the wall, cracking loudly like a pool noodle whacking the water’s surface. Something clicked. I picked up the piece of foam and frantically started squirting little piles of acrylic paint onto the left edge of an 8” x 11” panel. I took the straight edge of the foam and used it to draw paint across the panel in one fluid motion like a squeegee in screenprinting. The separate and dissonant colors began blending and forming seamless transitions of horizontal gradient. I was overjoyed and made fifteen or more that night. The remaining 100 or so paintings began this way. *Meet Me At The Horizon* is the call of the third layer, a direction in which I am traveling, and a dedication to Hodgkin.

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<sup>105</sup> Iva Kinnaird and Caroline Wells Chandler, *Queering the Lines*, *OutSmart Magazine*, March 26, 2015, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.outsmartmagazine.com/2015/03/queering-the-lines/>.

In April of 2016 I received a phone call from Angela Jones of Hudson and Jones Gallery in Cincinnati, Ohio. I met her once a year prior when I visited her gallery for AEQAI magazine to report on the *Hopeful Monster* exhibition, featuring the collective art group TODT. She had seen *Cavernal Murmur Vacuole* (Fig. 18) and enjoyed it enough to offer me an exhibition over the phone. Through several more conversations, we chose August 5th of 2017, meaning all of the paintings needed to be done by mid-July. The piece that grabbed her attention features a yonic form which can be read in many of my paintings in any number of ways. Anus, volcano from above, the sun, portal, crystal ball, moon, flower and doorway are all descriptive of the visual occurrence of an opening way. These problematize and layer horizon in a natural manner of painting. As the Quakers say, *I proceed as the way opens*. The formulation of portals, or spaces for further gazing, is the trace of deductive inquiry flowing from emptiness theory and most every philosophical school of thought. They are also emblematic focus objects for the concentration of meditation – or stand-alone markers of meditative practice. Pitted against so many anxious marks, portals sometimes become the waypoint for visual pause. *Catcher in the Cattails* (Fig. 19), for instance, is a reference to the popular J.D. Salinger novel which garnered many interpretations of homosexual undertones centrifuged around Holden's relationship with his role model Mr. Antolini, as well as the character Luce.<sup>106</sup> The painting features a large anal portal floating above a swamp clad in phallic cattails. The tinsel included here and in many other paintings is a mark of camp. Susan Sontag explains:

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<sup>106</sup> Ricky Werner, *Queer Adolescence: (Homo)sexuality in The Catcher in the Rye and The Bell Jar*, *ESharp*, 2nd ser., no. 6.



The whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to “the serious.” One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious.<sup>107</sup>

The term ‘Catcher’ here takes on an innuendo implying an anal sex bottom. Other paintings are of less happy substance. For instance, *It Never Happened, A Coldness for The Most Common Sign* (Fig. 20), references two separate dark ages in my personal history – one involves being sexually assaulted, and the other being stalked, attacked in public, and blackmailed because of my sexuality and closetedness. The most common sign refers to the asshole as a shared belief of queerness and the most normative state expounded by me and Chandler in our interviews.<sup>108</sup> *It Was Fifteen Years Ago Today* (Fig. 21) features a yellow circle with three red lines through it – a symbol I have used in my art since I was twelve years old (fifteen years prior to this writing), often including a blue border. That was about the time I first started queer explorations of body and fantasy. The symbol in a strange case of coincidence also suggests the third layer. *Beaches for Gemini Sisters* (Fig. 22) is a dedication to the moon, frequently a matronly symbol, to my non-familial sister Emily Sites (b.1988), with whom I lived with while being blackmailed and harassed for being a queer person. She was one of the first people I came out to.

Aside from relating personal stories, many paintings are dedications to other painters who’ve influenced my style. *Straight Down into The Volcano (Thank You A.H.)* (Fig. 25) references the paintings of Angela Heisch (b.1987) (Fig. 26 & 27) who I visited at her Brooklyn

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<sup>107</sup> Susan Sontag, *Notes On Camp*, accessed November 16, 2017, doi:<https://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html>.

<sup>108</sup> Caroline Wells Chandler, *A Conversation of Queer Aesthetics with Caroline Wells Chandler*, online interview by author, November 26, 2016.

studio in summer of 2017. I wrote an article about the experience for AEQAI Magazine titled

*Would you like a Lozenge: A Studio Visit with Angela Heisch.* In the essay, I wrote the following:

In the introduction to *Who Chicago?: An Exhibition of Contemporary Imagists*, published in '81, Victor Musgrave (1919-1984) writes beautifully about the way Imagists were in their own time, effectually late greats. He describes their merit as being of the same disregard for cultural norms and fashion as that of the Outsider artists whom they championed, Joseph Yoakum (1889-1972) and Martin Ramirez (1895-1963), nuanced by their compulsive collecting habits and seamless pastiche. Musgrave describes the group as they were, independent codependents who practiced autonomously and exhibited collectively their origin stories inextricably linked by their interests and Chicago.<sup>109</sup> Heisch's work is palatable in much the same way as the work of The Hairy Who or The Monster Roster through transformative memory belonging to formative years, the primary concurrence of public and private meaning, and a general awareness of popular society and its actors of psychosomatic schism.<sup>110</sup> Heisch maintains the veneer of fetish through her fastidious dedication to personal style. The idea of finish until fetish is something that comes up frequently in writing about Christina Ramberg's (1946-1995) work and I think Heisch achieves it.<sup>111</sup> I think the buzz word here, between the Imagists and Heisch, becomes idiosyncrasy. With idiosyncrasy Heisch merges craft with an architecturally personified corporeal convulsion and seals our eye. This technical facility is a mechanism of visual pleasure that was a mark of the Imagist too, made problematic by business it is a formal feat in which viewers delight.<sup>112</sup>

Seeing Angela's work in person was revelatory. It showed me the value of painstaking detail.

Beginning with the painting I named after Angela Heisch I decidedly began my return to concentrated mark-making as a meditative unburdening of my many anxieties instead of reference to them.

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<sup>109</sup> Tony Knipe et al., *Who Chicago?: An Exhibition of Contemporary Imagists: Adrian, Bowman, Knipe, Musgrave* (Sunderland: Sunderland Arts Centre, 1980), pg. #10.

<sup>110</sup> Dennis Adrian et al., *Who Chicago?: An Exhibition of Contemporary Imagists: Adrian, Bowman, Knipe, Musgrave* (Sunderland: Sunderland Arts Centre, 1980), pg. #16.

<sup>111</sup> Nancy Princenthal, *Christina Ramberg, New York, at David Nolan, Art In America*, April 11, 2012, accessed June 6, 2017, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/christina-ramberg/>.

<sup>112</sup> Jack A. Wood, Jr., *Would You like a Lozenge? A Studio Visit with Angela Heisch : AEQAI*, AEQAI RSS, June 10, 2017, accessed November 16, 2017, <http://aeqai.com/main/2017/06/a-studio-visit-with-angela-heisch/>.

I also felt called to revisit my interest in the Chicago Imagists (i.e. Christina Ramberg (1946-1995) (Fig. 28) and Roger Brown (1941-1997) (Fig. 29 & 30)), and many of my favorite obsessive and self-taught artists. My fascination with self-taught art has been perpetuated as an avid collector. Artists I have collected include Mose Tolliver (1918-2006) (Fig. 31), James Harold Jennings (1931-1999) (Fig. 32), and Sulton Rogers (1922-2003) (Fig. 33). Martin Ramirez (1895-1963) (Fig. 34) has also been a huge influence in my work. His obsessive dedication to a system of personal symbols and concentric lines always resonated with me because of its happenstance dedication to a teleology of living in mythos, and is why I obsessively seek images in which I feel predestined sight.<sup>113</sup> Seeking works of image makers who seem perplexed with concerns akin to my own is relational teleology in action.

By realizing visual cultures that have already made space for my weirdness, I can further project qualities of strangeness with a voice of variation, compiled of the ages and taught by many masters. The obsessive searching and returning to images that make me feel at home is nearly meditative and definitely repetitive. Making works that are specifically referential to my immediate colleagues and late greats of generations past extends their meaning into the endless sea of art history. Through this process I connect my paintings to a temporality that escapes my comprehension and serves in many ways to dissolve my ego. By recognizing the artists who've come before and the artists who are here with me now, I am calling out my aspirational benchmarks. I wish to be like them but I also never will. I make a sort of prostration, or libation

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<sup>113</sup> Predestined sight is a turn of phrase that I've conjured to describe images that seem to find a sympathetic viewer as opposed to the other way around. Predestined sight describes the interaction that occurs between me and visual art that explains things I already know or have experienced in ways that are nuanced or uncanny. It's when the picture on the wall "gets you."

to the past, present and future. *Meet Me At The Horizon* is effectively a relational installation of painting wherein the whole sum of the parts is not greater than the parts on their own. Each painting is terribly specific and of a receding micro-nature.

In an interview with Lion's Roar, Timothy Morton discusses the conceptual etymology of 'weird' as derived of a Norse word describing an intertwined looping. He explains that most of Western Philosophy attempts to explain the ways in which phenomenal reality is cooperatively created, when in fact most of its actors have nothing to do with humanity. He relates that even though conventional reality is about suffering it must also be about laughter and luminosity; that in spite of emptiness, dependent arising is communal, some belly laughs must be had because we are all heavily befallen with follies.<sup>114</sup>

Frequency of numbers in my work elaborates the root of 'weird'; repetitive, looping reactions in serial response to visual stimuli, in progressively intertwined sequences. (125 paintings at 8" x 11", 24 paintings at 8" x 22", and 15 paintings at 11" x 14"; 49 2' x 3' woodcuts, etc.). These acts of repetitive making are convergent on a distant glimpse of utopia. In making the 126 paintings in *Meet Me At The Horizon* at the same size (Fig. 35, 36, 37), I have found the importance of resourcefulness, to find humor in failure, to realize that they can't all be gems, but they can all be horizons. They are completely suffused with the idea that binds them. In further fortification of the word weird, each painting received a blend-rolled gradient of oil-based printmaking inks circumnavigating their panel sides (Fig. 38). Each was unique and

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<sup>114</sup> Timothy Morton and Sam Littlefair, *Groundbreaking Scholar Timothy Morton Wants Philosophers to Face Their Buddhaphobia*, *Lion's Roar Buddhist Wisdom for Our Time*, September 2, 2017, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.lionsroar.com/groundbreaking-scholar-timothy-morton-wants-philosophers-to-face-their-buddhaphobia/>.

painstakingly applied by hand with the help of several assistants. The edges further elaborate the metaphysics of perspective, the idea that there are worlds within worlds, that utopia is always becoming and never quite here, and that ultimate reality is conventionally unknowable.

#### HUSKY HORIZONS, BLUE BANNERS AND PAINTINGS LOOKING OUT

For the final iteration of *Meet Me At The Horizon*, I completed twenty-four paintings at 8" x 22" to form four columns of six paintings serving as spaces of breath between the five evenly spaced grids of twenty-five paintings that comprise the complete series. These double-wide, horizontal paintings are lovingly referred to as *Husky Horizons*. The titles are slightly more irreverent and evoke laughter or cavalier sensibilities functioning as jests pointed at melancholy. They are more visually sparse than their smaller counterparts; I wanted to achieve finished paintings in as few moves as possible. Many simply feature the initial smear of paint that begins nearly every painting in the entire series. *Marked By Void Surfers* (Fig. 39) is one of the more elaborate, but others such as *Lights of Fuzzy Loveless* (Fig. 40) and *Do The Burning Bush* (Fig. 41) are a space for pause, interceding the manic, shallow breathing of *Meet Me At The Horizon* – a pause more purely focused on color and simplicity.

*Paintings Looking Out* are a series of fifteen paintings at 11" x 14" and ten paintings that vary in size between 12" x 12" and 48" x 48". These are more elaborate continuations of the relational practice oriented around the metaphysical valence of *Meet Me At The Horizon*.

Whereas works included in *Meet Me at The Horizon* function as an installation, they are more literal in their iteration of philosophy and utopian mysticism, and function as only stand-alone pieces. They have a dual function as singular pictures as parts of a larger picture (read installation). Moving forward we'll see bigger isn't always better.

The fifteen paintings created at 11” x 14” relate transcendental visions of the Buddhist cosmology described earlier, but they also effectively imagine something of the empty sublime. *All At Once, Nothing At Last* (Fig. 42) imagines a luminous space of otherworldly transcendence while also relating anal, yonic, and phallic forms that inform a queer sexuality evocative of the third layer of embodiment, wherein creative agency holds true before denominator cultural values. *Perpetual Transfer Pitcher* (Fig. 43) is an illustration of what I see as a wrinkle in time, a place to enter the third layer. The tear-drop shape in the middle of the painting is a portal within a portal, with a portal inside, and perhaps another hovering like a setting sun before a dawning yet to come. Two diverging planes of landscape, which are effectively two edges of a portal themselves divide pictorial planes of night and day. Timothy Morton refers to a similar phenomenon in his description of world tubes:

Einstein’s discovery of spacetime was the discovery of a hyperobject—the way in which mass as such grips space, distorts it from within, stretching space time into whorls and vortices. For Einstein, entities—which may or may not include living observers—comprise indivisible “world tubes.” By *world tube*, relativity theory means to include the apprehending aspect of an entity with its entitive aspect. A world tube is a hyperobject. That is, world tubes stretch and snap our ideas of what an object is in the first place. Each world tube encounters a fundamentally different universe depending on its mass and velocity. World tubes recede from other world tubes in an inescapable and irreducible way.<sup>115</sup>

The idea that a world tube is receding irreducibly is simply another nomenclature for the dependent arising of emptiness theory. In many ways, I think Morton’s theory of hyperobjects supplants any mathematical mode of the sublime with something more creative and reaching for mystery. I think this is the job that art should do. Kant’s theory

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<sup>115</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 61.

of the mathematical sublime dismisses our creative faculty and is directly at odds with why I choose to create at all. Meditative deduction is a large part of my practice, though not in a traditionally Buddhist sense, instead through repetitive markmaking. Further, my creative ritual is totally concerned with the approximation of futurity which is not physically tenable, so far as my experience may allow. I paint phenomena that I have never and will never experience. *That Which We'll Follow Forever* (Fig. 44), is in many ways a very literal description of a hyperobject. The sun is bigger than humanity, as is the ocean. The title suggests two things. First, the message of the painting is very much linked to The Beatles song *I'll Follow the Sun* wherein Paul sings the following:

And now the time has come,  
And so my love I must go,  
And though I lose a friend  
In the end you'll know.  
One day you'll find that I have gone,  
But tomorrow may rain, so I'll follow the sun.<sup>116</sup>

The song is meant to be a melancholic love ballad centered around an apparently aloof male experience, wherein he is leaving love behind because his partner could not find it within herself to appreciate him enough. However, this is not the interpretation that I subscribe. I view the song's meaning as it applies to conventional reality. The sorrow and suffering of life cannot be helped, but through sharing of perspective, humor and joy can be found, and in spite of suffering there can be laughter and fun. To follow the sun is a choice made in disposition, although not easily. Secondly the painting describes the nature of hyperobjects. Morton contends that all

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<sup>116</sup> John Lennon and Paul McCartney, writers, *I'll Follow The Sun*, recorded October 18, 1964, in *Beatles for Sale*, The Beatles, George Martin, 1964, CD.

hyperobjects demand our efforts in understanding, but because of a “temporal foreshortening,” we do not have sufficient time to understand hyperobjects which exist without and around us in time. This also applies to the Buddhist idea of conventional reality, or samsara (the cycle of death of and rebirth). Ultimate reality seems like that which consumes all hyperobjects, but answers not humanity. Despite our generational boundedness we are obliged to encounter these hyperobjects. They do not regard us in the same light. There is no escape. “Entities that are massively distributed in time exert downward causal pressure on shorter-lived entities.”<sup>117</sup> We are those short-lived entities, and we are deeply feeling the anxiety (causally) exerted (downward) upon us by big things that we don’t have the lifespan to fully conceive of, much less solve.

I feel as if the goal of Buddhism is to countermand the ego that thinks otherwise. Buddhism, as a logic system, attempts to offer an approach to phenomenal reality focused about compassion and developing collective momentum to end suffering. The futurity of queer utopianism is similarly focused on a collective imagining of radically normative queerness, founded upon perpetual momentum toward further notions of the ungraspable. Paintings such as *Loud With Light* (Fig. 45) similarly illustrate our encounters with hyperobjects, however in a slightly different way than Morton’s ecological focus, which I maintain is naturally flowing from and inseparably connected to Buddhism. Hyperobjects are completely inseparable from the emptiness theory and theories of the sublime. They illustrate the entities, bulging with blackness and bile, that I envisioned in the night terrors of my youth. Morton’s writings about art regarding

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<sup>117</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 67.



hyperobjects calls for magnetism, catalysis, and magic instead of persuasion.<sup>118</sup> With my large installations full of tinsel, horizons spanning every side of every panel, and entire walls covered in patternesque, tripped-out landscapery I am trying to produce the sensation of being overwhelmed. The goal of the work is to place the viewer in the driver's seat of the car that will never stop winding down the road toward utopia.

They bring to an end the idea that Nature is something “over-yonder” behind the glass window of an aesthetic screen. Indeed, this very concept of Nature is itself a product of the Romantic phase. Hyperobjects likewise end the idea that things are lumps of blah decorated with accidents or not fully real until they interact with humans.<sup>119</sup>

The thesis of the hyperobject is the removal of the human ego from the center of the philosophical arena, whereby everything we can phenomenally consider becomes animate. This thorough breath of animation is the fabric suggested by dependent arising – difference is the only phenomenal quality that enables us to make claims about anything else. Dependent arising says that difference derives from difference and without it phenomenal reality would be immutable and static, frozen in an impossible still. Morton suggests that art, and human thinking, must begin to cope with hyperobjects.

Art in this mode approaches aesthetic transcendence of normative human limits, yet not as Schopenhauer predicted in his ascetic and sclerotic version of Buddhism, an escape from samsara into a realm of soothing contemplation. This contemplation is hot, intense, passionate, compassionate, intimate with death and poison, staking its place in the charnel ground, coexisting with specters and structures, with the mathēsis that tunes human cognition to the withdrawn thing. Is this not exactly what we need in order to live alongside hyperobjects? We shall be playing this game of coexistence for a very long time.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 172.

The idea of making art as one that accepts failure is necessary to approach a utopian queerness that is not for anyone to realize. It is a dedication to the collective compassionate joy that Buddhism suggests in the face of suffering and the acceptance of the hyperobject which completely engulfs its temporality. It is not necessarily to be considered a means to end, that art can operate ontologically, but instead and end to a means, that art must expound upon a teleology of failure. Earlier I wrote of Morton's reference to the interobjectivity between appearance and essence in the face of hyperobjects:<sup>121</sup> that the parts are actually more complex divided than they are when coming together to comprise the whole. Paintings such as *Quite Beneath the Light* (Fig. 46) suggest a world that violates us with the multiplicity of our being inessential, that is without essence. For me the complexity of reductive thinking is something I strive to evoke with dots. I feel like this is nowhere more present than in *Paintings Looking Out*.

Finally, I completed 42 unique 2'x 3' woodcuts made through color reduction printmaking, multi-block reduction, and single block processes printed with black ink on plain and colored paper. These images were editioned to varying degrees for use in the installation comprising *Pretty Color Time*, tiled vertically along an entire wall of the Weil Gallery in seven rows of seven. The prints themselves are filled with the subject matter I've been discussing throughout this thesis. What changes with the prints is my approach to institution. Printmaking has always been difficult for me because I am not prone to tradition, nor am I a big fan of rules or institutionalized systems of craft. Printmaking as an art practice is frequently centered around a sanctity of papers and their margins. There are established rules and procedures to follow to ensure each image looks completely the same and can be sold as such according to traditions

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 196.

tethered to capitalism and motivated by democracy. Part of my engagement with printmaking has long been motivated by my first professor of printmaking suggesting I “find something else.” What bothers me most about printmaking and its anal-retentive personalities is that the vast majority of the art viewing public does not know diddly-squat between a mezzotint and a giclee print. I have absorbed this notion intimately from nearly five years of professional experience working as an art expert at an auction house. Having trained staff and interacted intimately with our consumer public I can confidently express that nobody cares about the difference between offset lithography and aquatint etching, much less comprehend explanations of it. I approach printmaking as if it were painting. When printing my relief matrices I often animate as many as sixteen brayers at a time with blended rainbows of color. I purposefully oversaturate the surface because it may take as much as an hour to completely ink one block. I print with entirely too much pressure, and will often pull two prints from a single inking for the sake of saving time. My prints are not planned beyond a simple sketch beforehand, the woodcut tools scoop and push and edge like bristles of a brush, and they are frequently produced from start to finish in less than 48 hours. I sometimes change colors in the middle of an edition and my prints are almost always creased, distressed, unique, flawed. Despite my casting off of printmaking’s rules and regulations I get what I want. Effectively I am queering printmaking by obliterating its normative doctrines and getting results working from the outside in. By purposefully opening my practice to the many variables and snafus that others try to control, I open the matrix like a gaping portal to possibilities of utopian interference and failure. This is even suggested by prints such as *The Night Run, Ran Over* (Fig. 47) and *Banner For I-FREAK* (Fig.48) which suggest the intercession of weirdness and failure as generative tools of the queer utopian seeker.

Printmaking and my experience of it's community, a subculture of its own, has largely been the reason for my sticking with the creative path because of the people I've met, the places I've traveled and the challenges I've faced. There is an intuitive flux in the printmaking medium hiding like a sterling kernel of the third layer. The third layer is there, where the matrix meets the pressure between the bed and the press. If you look beyond the rules and technical strata into the machinery and its raw power to produce an image, in a single motion, that is difficult to tell from a painting, then you're free to develop rules of your own. This is why printmaking is popular as a tool of dissemination among subcultures. In many ways it has been my stairway into painting. Without printmaking and my social route through it I never would have envisioned a way for myself to make pictures with paint. I think Carol Summers (1925-2016) (Fig. 49), perhaps my greatest hero of printmaking, says it best:

I think an artist is a kind of inventor searching for a way to body forth his dreams or fantasies, his visions or caprices. The notion that there is a right way to make a print strikes me as exactly backwards, since any method tends to dictate a specific result. One of the charms of the woodcut for me is its very simplicity—it is essentially blotting ink from one surface to another, and so admits of endless variation...I don't see editioning as a sterile act of reproducing an original. Each child is different—the mother in me takes them all to heart, but the artist throws out the ones I don't like. They make wonderful wrapping paper.<sup>122</sup>

This is the attitude I approach printmaking with. My rules are my own. My printing process is another tool. Compared to painting, printmaking is more synthetic: it is mimetic and of synthesis. Printmaking in my painting process functions as a formulaic distillation of colors which through the process of collage expedites trial and error through easier manipulation. I can move printed

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<sup>122</sup> Carol Summers, *Carol Summers Catalogue Raisonne Woodcuts 1955-1988* (Tokyo: David Barnett Gallery & Randall Beck Gallery & CCA Galleries & Carol Summers, 1988), 7.

bits of paper around a surface to see if they work much more quickly than I can execute detailed layers of paint. The process of printmaking also offers an alternative physical quality of engagement, that I do not find in painting, through the process of carving. The most intense commonality felt between these two processes of mine is the repetition pronounced by both.

## CONCLUSION

The final body of work that I decided, albeit last minute, to include as part of my thesis is a small gathering of sculptural paintings on bricks and wooden busts, and a small carved pine figurine adorned with the hair of the person I was involved with when I began the landscape paintings. Staging the figures for the exhibition in the Weil Gallery left me at a loss. It became evident that all existing lights were necessary for illuminating the paintings and prints. I felt the sculptural works brought substance of the figure into the installation, but could not think of a way to stage the sculptures in the empty and unlit floor spaces. Eventually I placed them in the corner where I envision the third layer invisibly meets the dimensional plane of the gallery. In creative spaces, when I am working, I like to imagine the third layer as intuited, form within thought, the simultaneity of visualization meeting feeling together becoming reaction in the moment. It just so happened that the three paintings hanging above and before the corner on the gallery wall were lit diagonally and provided an ample surplus space of light. There I huddled, perched, and stacked the ten bricks adorned with tinsel and studio refuse, two busts, and single figure. I refer to the bricks as floor paintings. They are collected from around the building that houses my studio. People use bricks as door props and I take them. The busts and figure situated among the bricks are activated with personality and produce a equalizing wavelength within the group. I decided to name them *La Famille de Saltimbanques* after the famous Picasso of the

same title (Fig. 50). I imagined my strange little grouping of sculptures wandering quite like the circus people in Picasso's painting: oddly conjoined, half-walking, half-waiting, a family of queers ready to go shooting off inside a gallery of horizons (Fig. 51).

In *Pretty Color Time* it is the serial affectation that vibrates most directly from my work, like a technicolor convulsion brought on by sheer multiplicity. When people have nothing nice to say about my work they will often speak to quantity. It is the denominator elephant in the room. If I am good at anything it is getting to work. When people walk into my studio it is the frequency of visual stimulation that overwhelms them. It is the color that they get excited about. More than any of the ideas I've discussed it's the obsessive committal to work ethic that forms a lubricated substrate onto which theoretical mash can be applied. I do not believe in frontloading the verbalized contents of artworks because there is always somewhere new to go, and there are too many answers hidden in the physical act of getting there for me to sit around scheming. Speaking categorically there can be no identical repetition, so even a secondary visit to a place you've already been is brand new. I would argue that the most astounding results or new experiences occur well after the fifteenth or fiftieth time something is repeated. Returning through process is the stowage of meaning through a litany of ritually reproduced failure.

To divine my ritual, whereby utopia feels forward-frolicking into queer joy, whereby all the risk and shakiness of simultaneity is evident and the entire world is lit up with oppositional dependent natures, where by these natures are revealed as scribes of the illusory, I have to create a destination. I develop an ethic of creation outside of capital time and this is very queer – I almost always work at night.

In the cult classic *Repo Man* (1984) Harry Dean Stanton (1926-2017) inhabits the role of Bud, a stir-crazy cynic who's dying to leave the life of speed snorting and late nights repossessing cars. Bud takes a young dejected punk rocker named Otto (Emilio Estevez, b. 1962) under his wing. On one of their early adventures together Bud tells Otto: "What do you know? See an ordinary person spends his life avoiding tense situations. Repoman spends his life getting into tense situations."<sup>123</sup> Such is the job of an artist. I make my own schedule that often prohibits normalcy according to notions of nine to five, quotas, or performance reviews. I take my meals at different times every day. Creativity and resourcefulness permeate every corner of my world and when I'm in the making zone, tension is high but I feel high too. In his essay *Buddhaphobia*, Timothy Morton writes the following:

*Queerness* is, in *Buddhaphobia* at any rate, predicated on a fear of things, or of a certain feature of thingness, conjured up in the idea of fetishism, which has long been associated with homosexuality since the inception of the term in the later nineteenth century. That is to say, queerness has to do with what Judith Halberstam examines as an inverted fear of being buried alive—that something, some thing, is buried in me. There is an entity in me that is not me. As we shall see, this idea compresses a central tenet of Mahāyāna Buddhism concerning Buddha nature—it is an entity in me that is more than me. For specific forms of western thought, this entity has an intolerable object-like quality.<sup>124</sup>

What Morton is excavating with his ideas of thingness and object-ness is related to the Buddhist concept of dependent arising. When Morton discusses an object, he is referring to something that defies emptiness with its inherent existence. In the night tremors I had as a child the forms that terrified me the most held this quality of the inherently existing object as an ultimate manifestation of ego. In my work I dissolve fear, shame, and anxiety together and use them as

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<sup>123</sup> *Repo Man*, dir. Alex Cox, perf. Harry Dean Stanton (Los Angeles, 1984), DVD.

<sup>124</sup> Timothy Morton, *Buddhaphobia: Nothingness and The Fear of Things*, in *Nothing Three Inquires in Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

nightmare fuel for creating utopian fires which shine cleansing light on the relational dependency of differences. I see these wild flames through the queer gesture of repetition, or through the weird act of looping, and shackle that vision to joy and all of its luminosity while acknowledging I am one of the grumpiest and worried people I have ever met. I diffuse my worries in layers and layers of little dots. I make dots to feel high. *Rainbow Vs. Darkwave* (Fig.52) is in many ways an illustration of my therapeutic processes of art. My art work is the way I spell l-u-m-i-n-o-s-i-t-y: joy dressed in curmudgeonly clothes. In the final exhibition presentation of my work *Pretty Color Time* I sought to create an enthralling installation of some 240 art works (Fig. 53, 54, 55, 56). My aim was to overwhelm my viewers with the joyful notion of many colors, the everlasting condition of impermanence, the manic quality of moments passing into one another, and the idea that perhaps humanity does not exist at the center of all things and also that there is no ceiling for different ways of being. For all of hope's purposes it is mine that a love for and commitment to difference and weirdness shine evidently through my artwork.



## FIGURES



Figure 1, Jack Wood, *Many Roads Followed Beneath the Texas Moon*, acrylic on paper, 11" x 14", 2015



Figure 2, Jack Wood, *Bloodlights*, acrylic on paper, 11" x 14", 2015

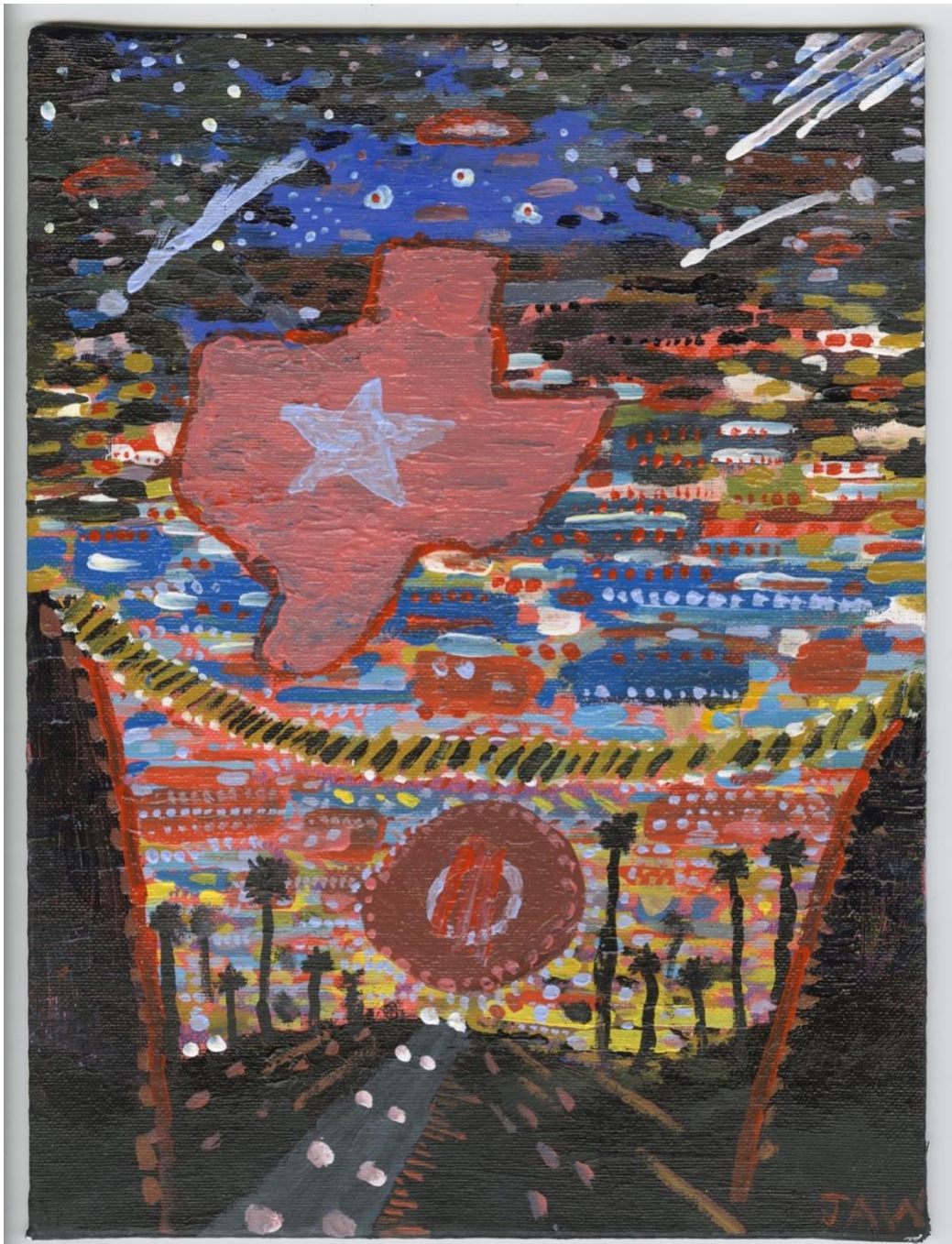


Figure 3, Jack Wood, *Maniac Hundred Shine*, acrylic on academy board, 9" x 12", 2015





Figure 4, Caroline Wells Chandler, *Little Hermes*, hand crocheted assorted fibers, 32" x 24", 2015



Figure 5, Emil Robinson, *Untitled*, oil on wood, 30" x 40", 2016, Image courtesy of the artist



Figure 6, *Howard Hodgkin, Saturdays*, oil on board, 52" x 60", 1969-1971, Courtesy Adelaide Collection Art Gallery of South Australia.





Figure 7, Howard Hodgkin, *Bombay Sunset*, oil on wood, 33 ½" x 36 ¼", 1972-1973.

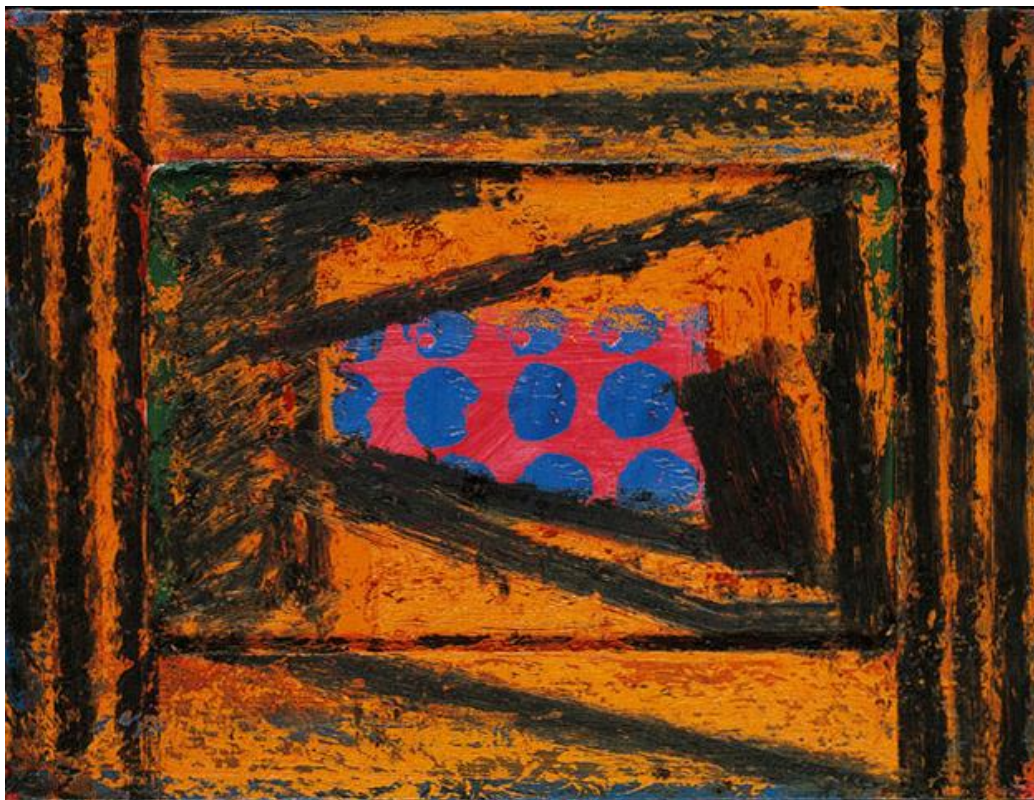


Figure 8, Howard Hodgking, *Prizeman's Perspective*, oil on wood, 11" x 14 ½", 1978-1979



Figure 9, Jack Wood, *Letter to Mimbus*, acrylic, collaged woodcuts, and spray paint on wooden panel, 21" x 32", 2016





*Figure 10, Loie Hollowell, Yellow Canyon Over Red Ground, oil, acrylic medium, and sawdust on linen panel, 21" x 28", 2016  
image courtesy of the artist*



*Figure 11, Loie Hollowell in her studio, I-Phone photograph taken by Jack Wood, 2016.*



Figure 12, Jack Wood, *That's Why They Call You Detritus*, oil and acrylic on wooden panel, 8" x 11" 2016.



Figure 13 Jack Wood, *Every World and Orgin*, oil and acrylic on wooden panel, 8 1/2" x 11 1/2".





*Figure 14* Caroline Wells Chandler, *Darcy*, hand crocheted assorted fibers, 69" x 90".



Figure 15, Gustave Courbet, *L'Origine du Monde*, oil on canvas, 18" x 22", 1866.



Figure 16, Jack Wood, *Lean Into Somber*, oil, acrylic and spray paint on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017.

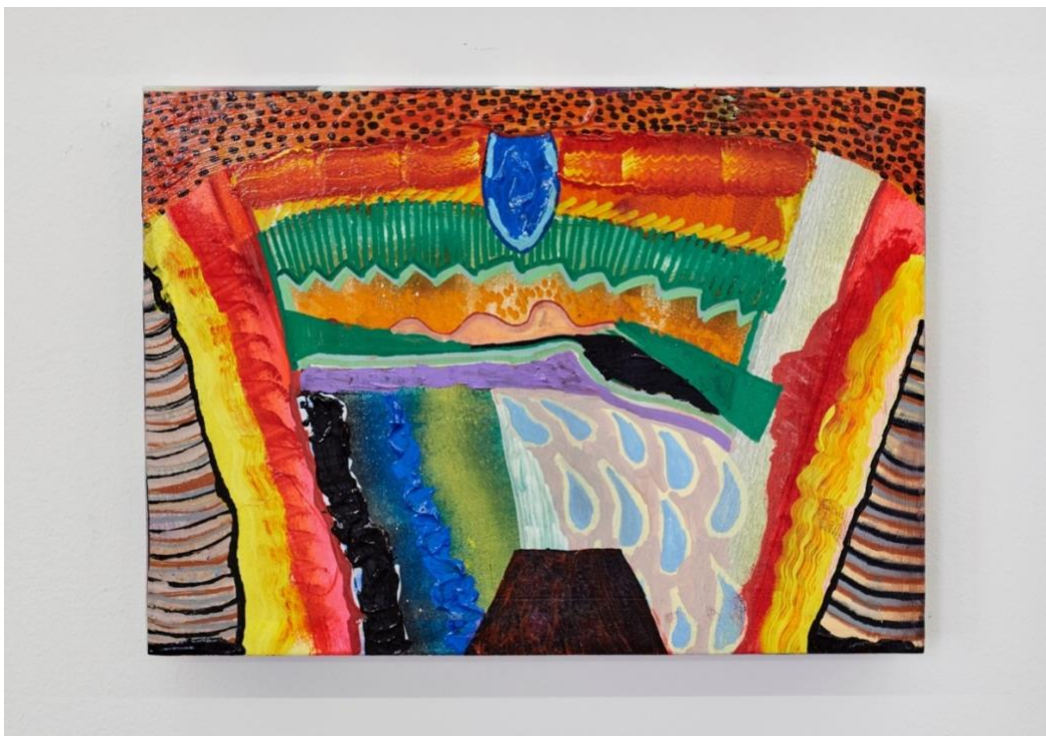


Figure 17, Jack Wood, *Burning your Backpack Down*, oil and acrylic on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017.





Figure 18, Jack Wood, *Cavernall Murmur Vacuole*, oil and acrylic on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017.



Figure 19, Jack Wood, *Catcher in the Cattails*, oil, acrylic, and tinsel on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017



Figure 20, Jack Wood, *It Never Happened, A Coldness For The Most Common Sign*, oil, acrylic, paper collage, gouache and spray paint on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017.



Figure 21, Jack Wood, *It Was Fifteen Years Ago Today*, oil, acrylic, and spray paint on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017





Figure 22, Jack Wood, *Beaches for Gemini Sisters*, oil and acrylic on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017



Figure 23, Jack Wood, *Dog Of The Changing Season II*, oil, acrylic, and spraypaint on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017

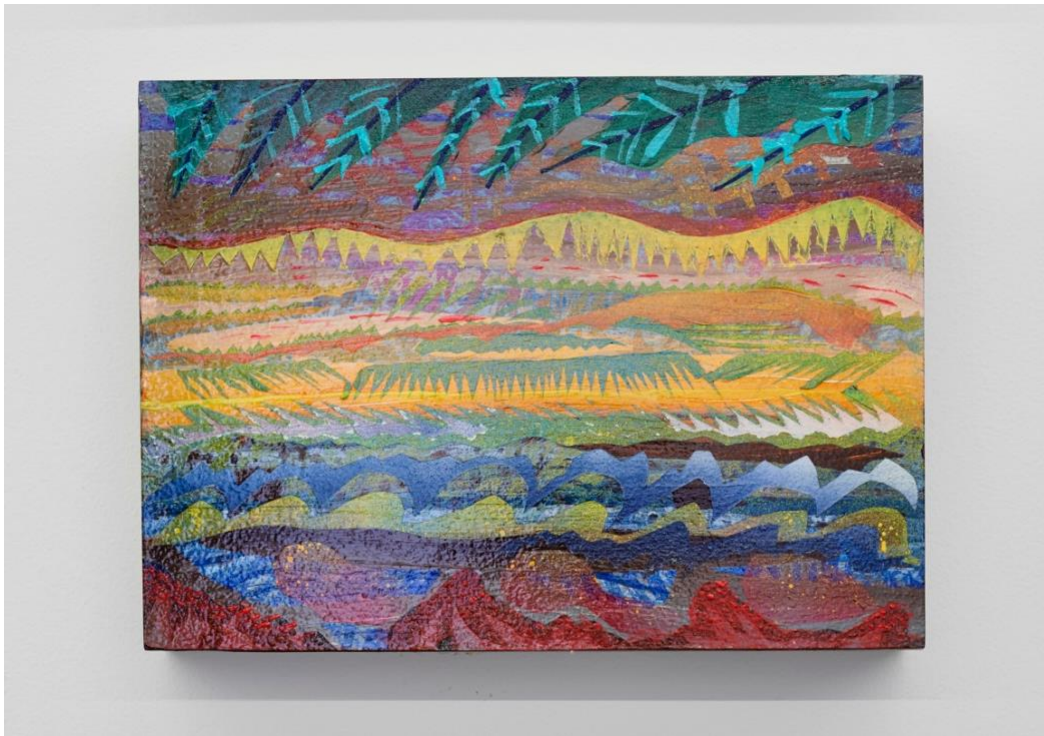


Figure 24, Jack Wood, *Middle Kingdom*, oil, acrylic and spray paint on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017



Figure 25, Jack Wood, *Straight Down into The Volcano (Thank You A.H.)*, oil, acrylic, collaged woodcuts, and spray paint on wooden panel, 8" x 11", 2017





Figure 26, Angela Heisch, *Voltine*, acryla gouache on canvas, 36" x 36", 2017, image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 27, Angela Heisch, *Townblock*, acryla gouache on muslin, 36" x 36", 2017, Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 28, Christina Ramberg, *Broken*, acrylic on Masonite with wooden frame, 49" x 37" x 2", 1975, Roger Brown Study Collection, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago



Figure 29, *Roger Brown, Couple Progressing Towards Mount Rincon, oil on canvas, 48" x 72", 1997, © The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Brown Family, courtesy of Kavi Gupta*





Figure 30, *Roger Brown, #1 Monument Valley Show B, oil on canvas, 13 3/4" x 13 3/4"*, © The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Brown Family, courtesy of Kavi Gupta



Figure 31, Mose Tolliver, *BoBo's Wife*, house paint on wood, 13 ¾" x 15 ¼", c. 1976

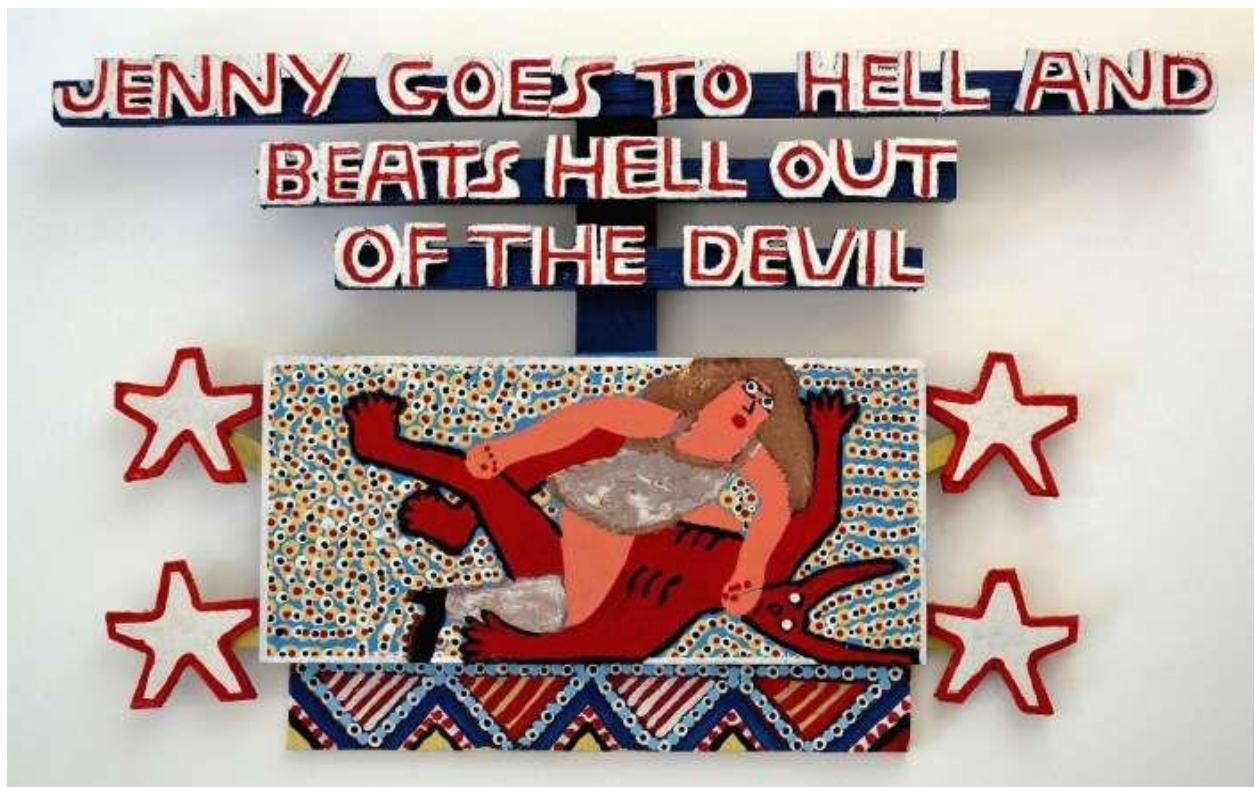


Figure 32, James Harold Jennings, *Jenny Beats Hell Out Of The Devil*, paint on assembled wood, 13" x 22" x 1 ½", 1988





Figure 33, Sulton Rogers, *Untitled ( Cat Man)*, polychromed wood, 16"x 3"x4", Collection of Jack Wood



*Figure 34, Martin Ramirez, *Untitled*, crayon and pencil on pieced paper, 22 7/8" x 30", c. 1948-63, From the collection of Michael Noland, Photo courtesy of Michael Noland.*



Figure 35, Jack Wood, *Meet Me At The Horizon* (Installed at Hudson Jones), oil, acrylic, black velvet, tinsel, print collage, and spray paint on panels, 50 8" x 11" paintings on panel, each grid approximately 66" x 70", 2017

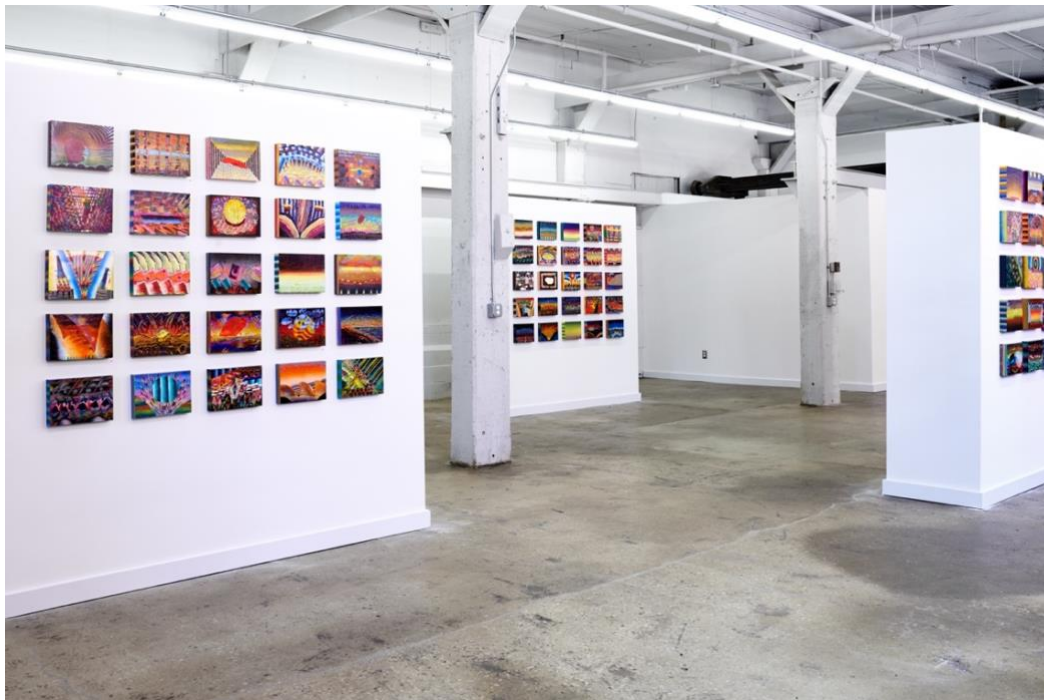


Figure 36, Jack Wood, *Meet Me At The Horizon* (Installed at Hudson Jones), oil, acrylic, black velvet, tinsel, print collage, and spray paint on panels, 60 8" x 11" paintings on panel, each grid approximately 66" x 70", 2017



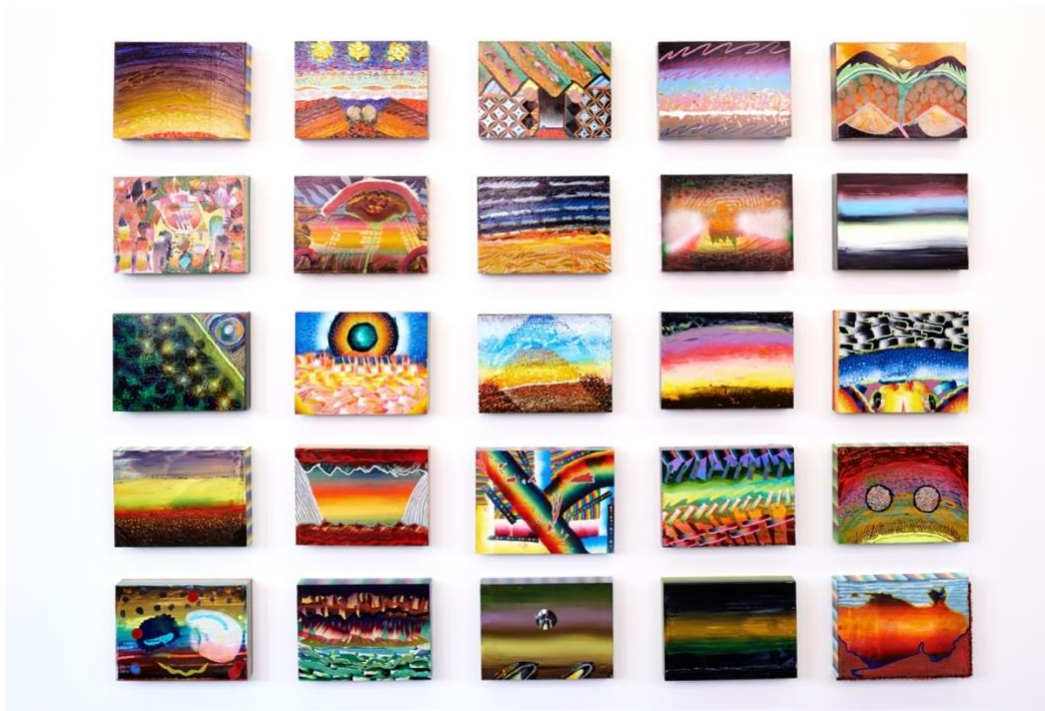


Figure 37, Jack Wood, *Meet Me At The Horizon* (Installed at Hudson Jones), oil, acrylic, black velvet, tinsel, print collage, and spray paint on panels, 25 8" x 11" paintings on panel, grid measures approximately 66" x 70", 2017



Figure 38, Jack Wood, *Meet Me At The Horizon* (Installation Detail at Hudson Jones), oil, acrylic, black velvet, tinsel, print collage, and spray paint on panels, 25 8" x 11" paintings on pane



Figure 39, Jack Wood, *Marked By Void Surfers*, acrylic, spray paint, and paper collage on wooden panel, 8" x 22", 2017



Figure 40, Jack Wood, *Lights of Fuzzy Loveless*, acrylic and oil on panel, 8" x 22", 2017



Figure 41, Jack Wood, *Do The Burning Bush*, acrylic, oil, collaged paper and black velvet on panel, 8" x 22", 2017



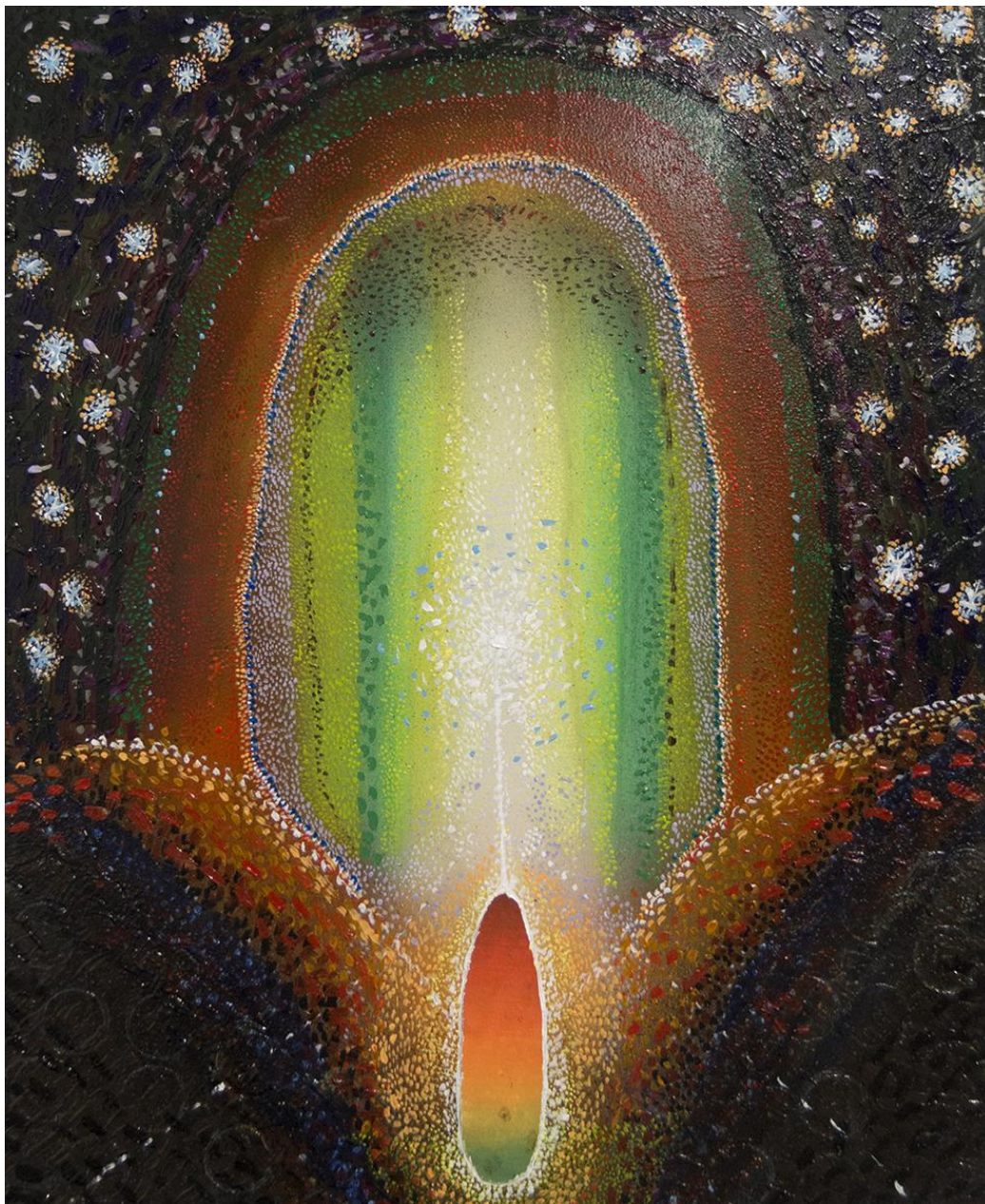


Figure 42, Jack Wood, *All At Once, Nothing At Last*, acrylic, spray paint and oil on panel, 14" x 17", 2017





Figure 43, Jack Wood, *Perpetual Transfer Pitcher*, acrylic, spray paint, collaged prints, oil, and black velvet on panel, 14" x 17", 2017.



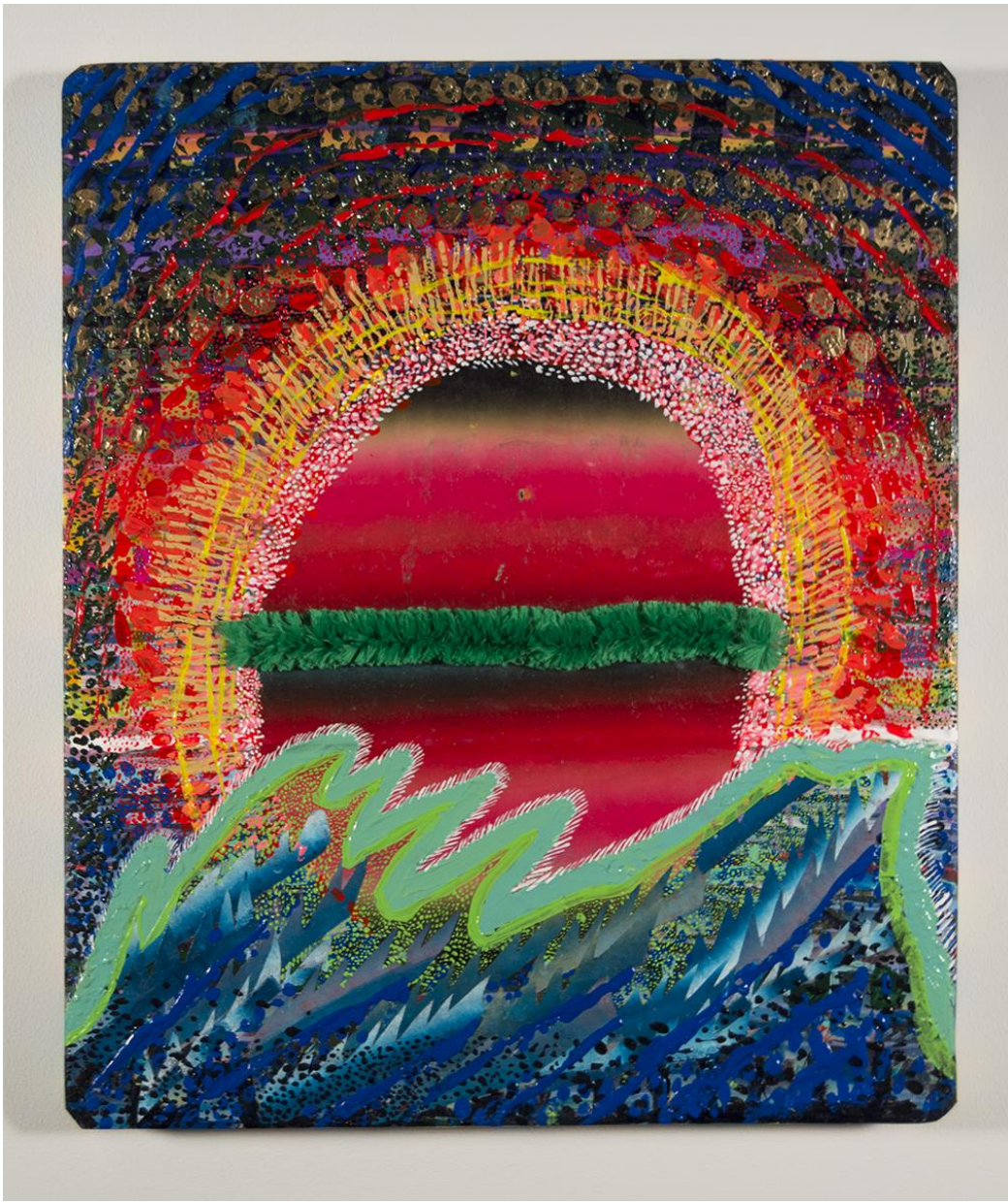


Figure 44, Jack Wood, *That Which We'll Follow Forever*, oil, acrylic, collaged prints, and jumbo pipe cleaner on panel, 19" x 22", 2017





Figure 45, Jack Wood, *Loud With Light*, acrylic, print collage and oil on panel, 20" x 22", 2017





Figure 46, Jack Wood, *Time Is Big Under The Blue Moon*, acrylic, print collage, and oil on panel, 22" x 31", 2017



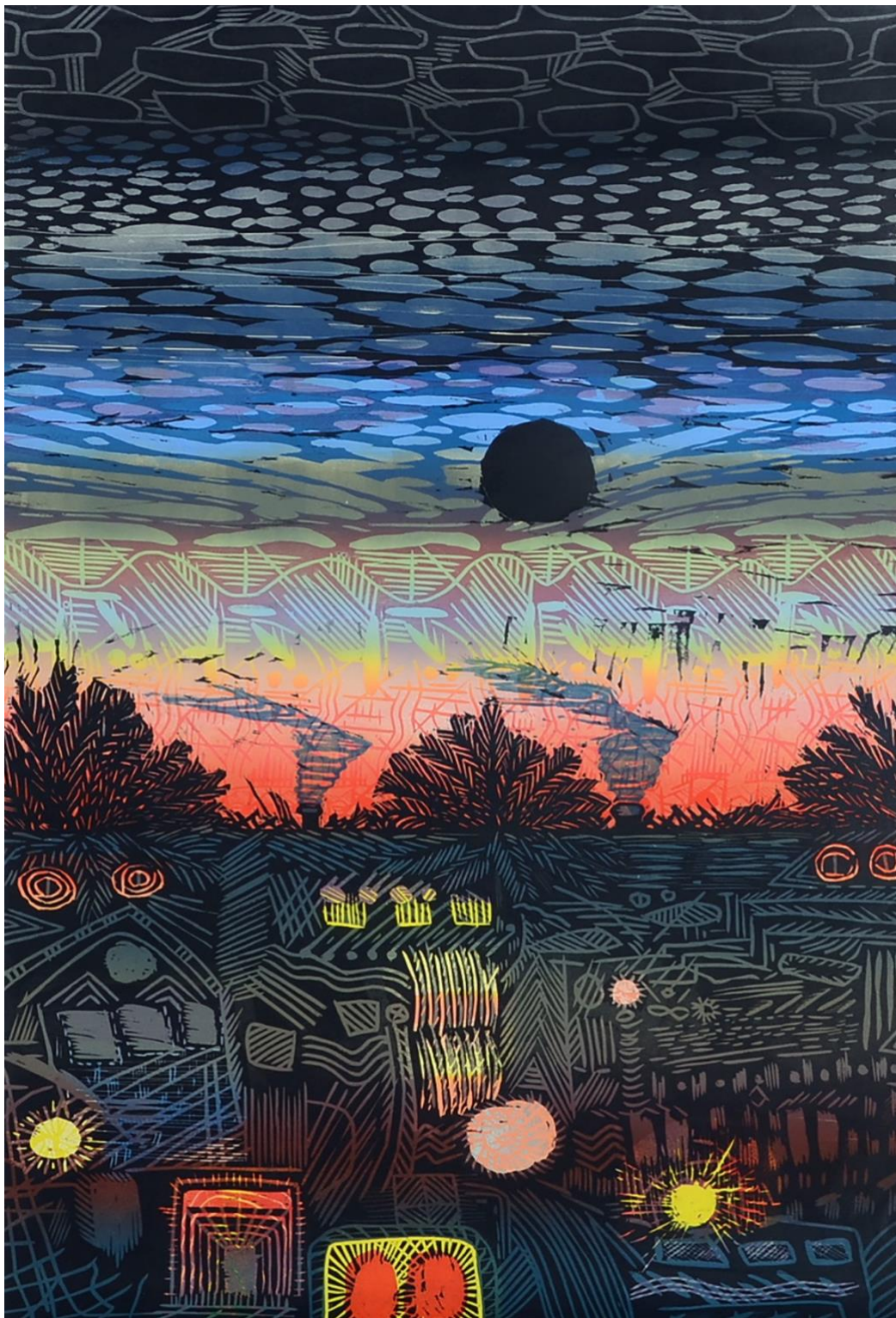


Figure 47, Jack Wood, *The Night Run, Ran Over*, reductive multiblock woodcut on kitakata, 24" x 36", 2016





Figure 48, Jack Wood, *Banner For I-FREAK*, woodcut on mango paper, 24" x 36", 2017



Figure 49, Carol Summers, *Sunset After Storm*, woodcut on paper, 12 1/8" x 12 1/8", 1988





Figure 50, Pablo Picasso, *La famille de Saltimbanques*, oil on canvas, 83 3/4" x 90 3/8", 1905

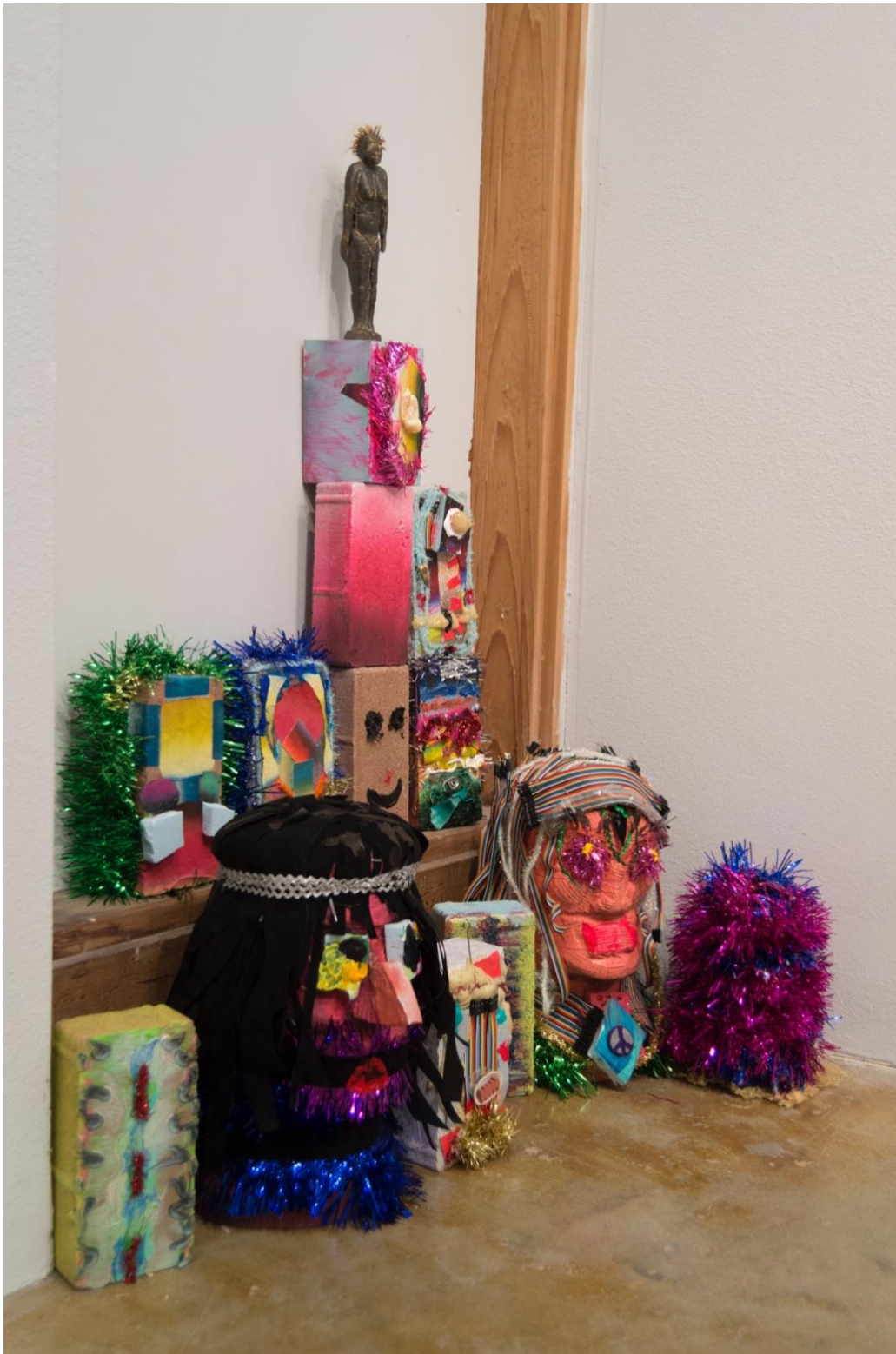


Figure 51, Jack Wood, *La Famille de Saltimbanques*, mixed media sculpture installation, dimensions variable, 2017





Figure 52, Jack Wood, *Rainbow Vs. Darkwave*, acrylic, print collage, oil and spray paint on panel, 11" x 14", 2017





Figure 53, Jack Wood, *Wall of Blue Banners*, installation of 49 woodcuts and tinsel garland, approximately 14' x 22 ½', 2017



Figure 54, Jack Wood, *Pretty Color Time* (Installation Detail #1), dimensions variable, 2017



Figure 55, Jack Wood, *Pretty Color Time* (Installation Detail #2), dimensions variable, 2017

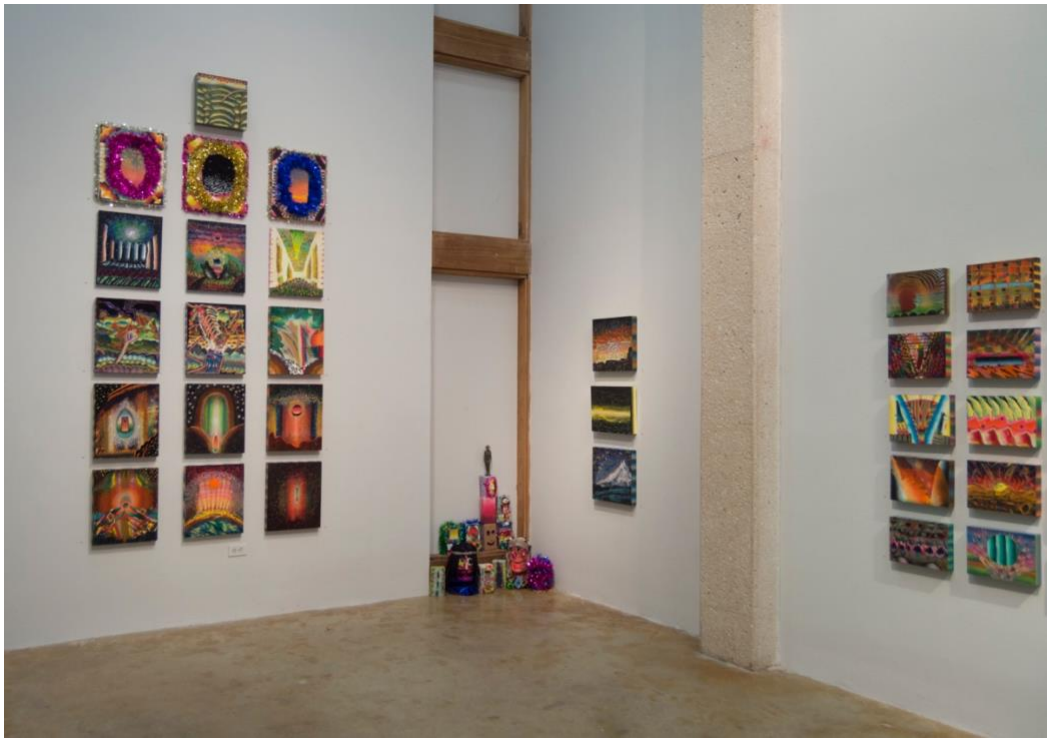


Figure 56, Jack Wood, *Pretty Color Time (Installation Detail #3)*, dimensions variable, 2017

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