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Buffaloed

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BUFFALOED

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of Studio Art

by
Miles Kinney
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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain the methodologies of painting that I have adapted over my time as an MFA candidate at LSU. Through this examination, I elaborate on the inspirations for those methodologies and how they inform my studio practice. This thesis is broken down into separate essays that investigate those methodologies, artistic influences, chosen content, and an analysis of paintings selected for the final thesis exhibition.
Introduction

Background

The way I work today is pretty much the way I've worked my entire life, and those early experiences are still with me in the studio. I remember drawing notebooks full of doodles when I was a kid, mashing together whatever I could draw until the paper was full. I'd draw the characters on TV (mainly cartoons) or make copies of the pictures from gaming magazines and fantasy coloring books. I was the kid who always had a sketchbook and would bury myself in drawing until I ran out of paper or ideas. I was attracted to the preposterous humor of disparate things, and seeing those old drawings, compared with what I make today, I'd say not a lot has changed.

Despite this early fascination, my childhood was not absorbed in the arts; in fact, it was the opposite. I'm from a rural and poor "uncultured" part of central New York, grew up in a broken home, ate TV dinners and fast food, and never really left my mountain town until I was an adult. I'm from a long line of factory workers and day laborers, so art and culture weren't the cornerstones of my upbringing. I didn't have structure, religion, or an enriching family environment. I didn't even go to a museum until I was eighteen. Despite all that, my high school art room had a library nook with holdovers from the past hundred years of art teachers, so I had some resources at hand.

I gravitated toward Courbet, Manet, Bacon, De Chirico, and Giacometti's sculptures between the books on art movements and the overviews of art history. That nook had a surprisingly strong surrealism collection, so that's what I engaged with the most. I loved the space in Miro, the horizons of Matta, and the primordial worlds of Tanguy. I'd laugh about Oppenheim's Fur Bowl or awe at the eeriness of Magritte's trompe l'oeil paintings. I practiced surrealist exercises with my friends and read Breton's manifesto or gawked at Max Ernst's Oedipus Rex instead of doing math homework and failing economics.

That exposure to the Surrealists and contemporary art-historical sources drove me to want to make a more inventive, intuitive type of artwork than the observational studies of my high school art program. As a result, when I began building my portfolio for art schools, I was making wooden sculptures imitating Giacometti's sexual objects or painting a series of mixed media paintings based on Cadmus's Seven Deadly Sins. I engaged with these artists' sensibilities and the surrealist language because I liked its absurdity, notably how they combined things to create amalgams of images.

When I began to paint my own pictures, I realized early on that I didn't want to paint something just to see it painted. I wanted to make stories or an apotheosis, but I wanted to do so in a way that felt entertaining and combined my interests. Growing up and mashing doodles
together, was a process that naturally inserted itself into the work I wanted to make. The
tendency toward amalgamation I'd seen in the Surrealists became increasingly crucial to the
way I work, but I didn't really have a name for what I was doing. I only thought of it as painted
collage, synthetic assemblage, or some rip-off of surrealism. It wasn't until I was 30 that I heard
the term composite painting, it resonated, and that's how I refer to my paintings to this day.

The Beginning of the Composite Paintings

The early practice of engaging with art history and appropriating the artists' works in
those books began blending with my childhood copying various media sources. Sometimes
when something feels familiar, it ends up happening intuitively, and throughout my BFA, the
paintings I would make favored invention and visual collage over observational reproduction or
illusionistic realism. As I'd come to call them later, these composites gave me the authority to
filter whatever caught my attention into painted realities. It was a pandora's box moment, but I
didn't always get it right.

Many of these early paintings combined political sources with symbols of class and
culture in compromising moral positions, such as Abe Lincoln staring at a copy of Kim
Kardashians Paper magazine cover or Richard Nixon fist-pumping next to a shunga print of a
bare-breasted woman. I was combining things like Jesus and the Lone Ranger or having putti
from renaissance paintings tortured by figures from Japanese prints. Sometimes the figures
would be contemporaneous political pundits like Chris Christie ogling the penis of the Nirvana
Baby or the animatronic shark from Jaws with Dick Chaney getting hacked at by a Samurai from
one of Muybridge's photographs.

I discovered in these paintings that by working with a conglomerate of sources, I could
produce unexpected relationships that could make loaded narratives even though the sources
were seemingly disparate. For instance, the painting with Nixon added up to a narrative about
American exceptionalism and how that leads to things like Asian misidentification in western
culture. I thought of Chaney, the shark, and the Samurai as brothers linked by a dying creed of
empirical republicanism. When combined, the Lone Ranger and Jesus were symbols of the
white savior complex, and Chris Christie's glutinous jowls sweating in front of a chlorine-soaked
infant was all about the dollar on the string.
In the pursuit of making these composites more explicit, I realized the potency of the media we consume. Irrespective of the source in these paintings, I began to appreciate that generating narrative intent could work with nearly anything. Implications through connotation are everywhere in art history, from Baroque still life to Picasso or David Salle. The process not only worked when the sources were recognizable moments from media or history but also functioned effectively when the symbols were legible and tangible. For instance, a painting constructed from an 18th-century photograph of Lincoln and a magazine cover of Kim Kardashian could say the same thing as a painting of a bottle of jerkins, a five-dollar bill, and a bottle of champagne. A visual composite creates a story that makes sense when the signs and their signals have legibility, so you do not need contemporary cultures, history, and hot button topics to give up the goat quickly. Sometimes the enigma and the search for meaning are part of the fun.

The Influence of Peter Saul at the Whitney in 2015

Around the time of these paintings, I sat in on a lecture by Peter Saul after his retrospective *From Pop to Punk* was on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Despite my early fascination with Surrealists, I'd grown away from them and was following artists like Peter Saul, David Salle, Neo Rauch, and Nicole Eisenman (who I saw lecture the week before) and was beginning to think more about the connections of the symbols in my paintings. What I took away from Saul's speech was that I didn't connect with the bright, vibrant, and expertly
rendered paintings of his mature work but the rough attempts at expressionism he made in the sixties during the infancy of the pop-art movement. These paintings, probably paintings that I read more into than he did, were a system that I thought I could adopt in my painting practice.

![Figure 3. Ice Box No.8, 75"x63", Peter Saul, 1963](image1)

![Figure 4. Mad Doctor, 70"x78", Peter Saul, 1964](image2)

In contrast to what I was doing at the time with my content, Saul's sources, recognizable through their reliance on branding and cultural imagery, didn't read so fast. They made me stop and look, add things up and linger with the picture before a conclusion of what he was saying could be conjured. For instance, Superman and Donald duck are reoccurring characters in these paintings, but Superman doesn't look like the typical man of steel. He has the cape, his outfit's color scheme, and the S on his chest, but his face is left blank, and his features are distorted, formless, and pliable. Donald duck is a caricature of the Disney staple, one that can be a nurse or a police officer whose likeness is nearly indiscernible from the original. This repetitive usage divorced and distorted the content from its original intent and ascribed itself to something entirely different. These beloved staples of Americana were now transformed into mechanisms that supported the theme of the painting, allowing Saul a type of ownership over them as if they were his creations.

From that lecture, I took away that there is a difference between imitation and appropriation. When imitating an image, the way I was doing in my composite paintings from New York, it happens in a way that renders the source objectively and denies it translatory energy through the artist’s subjective interpretation. Essentially, it copies the content verbatim and that can become flat and lifeless. In contrast, when appropriating a thing, the original is used as a model, and a model is not tethered to the likeness of the original. I've tried to keep
this difference between imitation and appropriation as a type of guide or ideology. For example, when I'm using a recognizable character, I ask myself if this insertion is to satisfy some plug-in value of an equation? Or is it going to add to the complexity of that equation as an unknown variable that requires another insertion to explain?

Figure 5. History is A Chalkboard, 46”x50”, Miles Kinney 2020

Cartoons

Media has always been integral to the language I use in my paintings, but cartoons particularly interest me because of their innate ability to summarize complex subjects and regurgitate them visually. The cartoon can be a highly provocative tool because the visual impressions they imprint on the zeitgeist are so potent that their styles become iconic. That perceptibility inspires me as a tool for communication because the formal simplicities allow
things to be relayed rapidly in a pictorial space. Because of this, I've always thought of cartooned media as a production center that invents new signs and symbols daily that have widespread accessibility within class and culture. When adopted colloquially, the ownership of those symbols becomes universal, and their intent becomes malleable to limitless new circumstances.

A certain generational familiarity exists with cartoons, and it can be enigmatic. It's an understanding dependent on sentimentalities, taste, and exposure that inhibits ubiquitous interpretation. The memory of a cartooned image can entangle itself with a feeling or scenario; it can be a form of self-documentation or projection unique to each person who encounters it. The unpredictability of those personal relationships doesn't necessarily frighten me away from using them in my work. If anything, it has the opposite effect, where the challenge of adhering that legibility to my intent can result in unforeseeable rewards. These obstacles endow the process of content selection with a necessity for research, and that process leads to discoveries or directions I wouldn't have discerned otherwise.

Something is alluring about using another person's cartoon because what's given has already undergone a process of distortion or simplification. The resulting caricature of a thing that is already a parody enhances certain qualities of absurdism or intent in its reproduction that I find impactful in a way that the original can't achieve. The childish nature inherent in cartoons, the innocence of their design, and the often-wholesome nature of their form allow them to convey heavy criticism of the social, cultural, or political environment in an easy-to-digest format. In essence, the cartoon can be a surrogate of our mental landscapes that allows people to act out their most obscene fantasies from the distance of reality.

When I use a character like Fred Flintstone, Beavis, Superman, or other cartoony sources, I think of it like writing—except the text has been replaced with a pictographic system. But, unlike a pictograph, the read is not dependent on sequence or standardization because the personal relationship of the audience to the content invites interpretation. Instead, the story unfolds by the parts relative to one another in an ontological fashion. The individual assembles these parts when looking, much like I had to when I painted the picture. Some will assign the same values I have to these cartooned symbols and their relationships, but I try and leave it enigmatic enough so that others might fail to see the allegory or invent a new one on their own.
Beavis has become a reoccurring figure in my recent work because I feel a certain kinship to the character. He's a symbol for me that is equally autobiographical and socially critical. He is like a waste product of failed institutions, the lowest common denominator of society, or a tragic representation of how civilization doesn't always create civilized people. Psychological classifications aside (because the DSM does not quantify levels of teenage jackass-ness), I see his behaviors as symptomatic of the failures of that civilizations underlying greater social contract. As someone who grew up poor and in an age where it was common to be raised by technology and media, I sympathize with and despise what he represents.

_Nesting Beavis_ (figure 6) is about how society tames people like Beavis and how technology plays a role. The format of the painting is taken from a type of web browser game that appeared in endless iterations when I was growing up where the player has a list of options
to choose from to raise a creature, or in some cases (often celebrities or politicians) humiliate them. The pictograms in this painting are choices for how to treat Beavis and read from top to bottom, symbolize erasure, feeding, punishment, psychology, or hygiene. The glowing aura on the three Beavis heads implies that something existential is affecting these characters, while the mouse cursor puts the viewer in the position of that existential entity. The beholder is choosing to delete this failure of our civilization, effectively ending the game and solving the problem.

Too Big for the Bed

In the painting Too Big for The Bed, Fred Flintstones acts as a patriarchal figure that symbolizes the qualities of the middle-class male. He is a stereotypical icon of the blue-collar industries, and the orange Trans-am he's driving was, at one time, the pinnacle of coolness and muscle care machismo. The car’s decals of a t-rex head and the bitten chicken wing decorate the vehicle with tropes of boyhood awesomeness. Behind this, the background is a row of turquoise palm trees outlined in electric pink like an 80's advertisement for a vacation on Miami beach or the Vegas strip. This bodacious scene unfolds in a thought bubble emanating from the oversized figure that links the passage to a childhood fantasy about adulthood. In the glossy blackness, a check engine light implies that being a grown-up is not all that awesome.

The massive figure in the center of the composition, wearing gridded long-johns, cowboy boots, and a Beavis mask, has outgrown his childhood bed and seems to be in a physical transition between the space of his youth and the future he is dreaming. The bed with humanoid legs wears yellow Nikes and Superman tube socks, symbolic remnants of his childhood. In contrast, his hairy hands are an exaggeration of puberty which simultaneously expresses a type of animalistic manliness, and the spindly hair and ape-like skin are metaphors for the grotesques of that transformation. The Beavis mask he is wearing suggests that, like Beavis, he’s trapped in stunted adulthood, never able to fully launch or take the next step to reach his dreams. Above his head hovers the reflection only he can see, a fully-fledged, hairy ape of a man wearing a champagne-colored cap and predator sunglasses. The beheaded figure of his cartoon show counterpart leaks out in a pool of static from the set of their infamous rants on culture, music, and growing up.

The composition is claustrophobic, and the elements press so tightly to the foreground edge that they threaten to break out of the confinement of the picture plane. This pictorial space pushes closer to the foreground by the slatted green wall of the middle ground and the way the dividing screen protrudes from that wall before trailing off the bottom edge of the canvas. The space suggests how uncomfortable these transitions can be or how quickly people outgrow the places that once made them feel safe and secure. The busyness of the composition
illustrates the pace at which these things happen. It is a metaphoric reflection on the restless cacophony of knowing something is ahead but not knowing how long it will take to get there or what that place will look like.
Figure 7. Too Big For the Bed, 84"x70", Miles Kinney 2022
Smoking, Philip Guston’s Rug, and Burning Beavis.

Guston’s impact on the way I think about painting has been growing for years, but the effects of that influence started to appear more pronounced during my time as a graduate student. That influence started with a painting I made in 2020 titled Smoking and stuck with me through the final paintings in this thesis.

![Figure 8. Smoking, 40”x30”, Miles Kinney, 2020](image)

Before Smoking, I tended to dress the underpainting in thin glaze layers until the surface felt finished—effectively breaking the painting into two stages: drawing and coloring. This approach was not a choice made stylistically or to further intent but developed as a matter of economics because thin paint goes further. It does make painting more affordable, but the problem I had with this process was that if the picture were not good, I’d trick myself into sticking with it, hoping that the color or glazes would save it.

I did not see any of that glazing over fussily preserved underpainting in Guston's late work. Instead, I saw thick paint, graphic outlining, layers of erasure, and raw forms that held real weight. I wanted to make Smoking the way I imagined Guston would if he painted it, so I kept the drawing loose, worked on it wet, did not give it any time to dry, and made revisions by wiping away or working through that wetness. I tried to match his color by limiting the palette to mars black, cobalt blue, zinc white, and yellow ochre. The result was a painting that felt
unified by color, form, and content that looked intentional, even though the final image came about in an almost accidental or expressionistic way.

It is common for artists to experiment with the tastes or sensibilities of another artist when trying to solve problems with their process or content, and Guston himself expressed as much in the documentary *A Life Lived* (1981) when he said, "Yeah, the Mother and Child, I was seventeen years old, I was studying the renaissance paintings as well as the de Chirico’s and Picasso’s of the '20s. You have to come from somewhere; you don't come out of the sky." When looking at Guston’s *Rug* (1976), I felt authorized by this comment to take my emulation of the artist a step further, and in the Painting *Burning Beavis*, I used the color palette and composition of *Rug* to construct the image.

Figure 9. *Rug, 81"x110", Philip Guston, 1976*

*Rug* is a funny painting when I reflect on what I know about Guston’s work. It seems like a point of departure. It is somehow different from the rest of his work, or like a one-off, because it uses the tangible space of a room with a floor, a wall with molding, and a background. It has a stage-like viewpoint, and it does not hang in the ether of color fields and
erasures like so many of his other works seem to do. Instead, it is a very concrete image with an anchored, central focus set in a believable--albeit cartoony--pictorial environment. The work is still obviously a Guston, but maybe it's not Guston's best or not Guston on a good day. That awkwardness, or what I read as awkwardness, made me feel licensed to redo it in my own way.

Experts on Guston talk incessantly about how his paintings address society, history or rebel against the formalistic hegemony of abstract expressionism. I can see that in Rug; the painting uses the undulating tangle of piled limbs and shoes that have become synonymous with Guston's reflection on the holocaust, and the isolation of the space—the timeless clock—alludes to a psychological contemplation on the atrocities of humankind. It is even handled in an almost dull manner of zombie execution (compared to other paintings from this period) like he was on autopilot. However, I can't help but look at Rug and see it as a kind of ceremonial spring cleaning—like the way people pile things up to get one last look at them before they haul them to the trash.

In painting Burning Beavis, I was (in a metaphorical sense) living out that interpretation of Guston's Rug. I had become suspicious of the content I was using, particularly the Beavis
heads, and was beginning to question the figure's permanency in my future work. I thought of it as a sacrificial practice, whereby working a cover of another artist, I might rid myself of what was growing stale. Like Rug, I piled these symbols up in the center of the composition to get one last look at them before giving them a formal goodbye.
Whack-A-Moles

My Relationship to the Arcade.

The Arcades and, by extension, arcade cabinets were everywhere growing up in the early 90s. Skating rinks had them; movie theaters had driving simulators like Rush and Crusin' USA. Even the laundromat and some gas stations had an aging Space Invaders or Mortal Kombat hanging around. However, the dedicated brick and mortar arcades were phasing out due to the increased popularity of home consoles and the cultural shift to convenient stay-at-home entertainment. Being born in 1989, I always felt like I missed the golden age where these escapist simulators existed in the intended display of their social splendor.

I had this vision that in the early 80s, arcades were meccas where consumer culture flourished, rebellion was currency, and young people (particularly youthful fashionistas and technophile enthusiasts) assembled in a neon haze of adolescent peacocking, awash in the colorful lights of flickering monitors and the exquisite decoration of hi-key saturated arcade cabinets. Watching films or cartoons from this period is enough to imagine these places' cultural impact on society. I imagined the arcade as the mainstream introduction of the digital age, or better yet, the computer age; being in those places must have been like escaping reality to spend a Friday night on the set of Bladerunner or Star Wars.

Looking back on that fantasy today, I know that the arcade was not as utopic as I'd dreamed. It was probably just a carpet floor sticky with fountain soda. The people were probably herded, nerdy cliques of societally dysfunctional teenagers cursed by too much free time, pockets filled with quarters and melted candy bars. Whatever the case, its allure permeated deep. It manifested into an almost religious zeal for seeing those machines elevated from a vernacular cast-off at the end of a Citgo checkout counter to the oil-painted tableaus they are today. I wanted to capture that dichotomous reality in these paintings.
I painted *Vacation Beach Brawl* (figure11) during the summer when I had not taken a vacation in a few years and was in a cynical, condemning mood, thinking about the behavior of Americans at beaches as the Covid restrictions rolled back. I was looking up stock images when I went down a YouTube rabbit hole that led me to a thread of videos of drunk beachgoers fighting. I had envisioned some parody of the subject, like replacing the characters from Mortal Kombat or Streetfighter with those people. I invented the rest from research about the arcade cabinets and the implements and decorations of the control panels and marquess in my favorite cabinets. The result was a title screen depicting the fighters to choose from, while the cabinet is a palette of summer colors and artifacts from the beach.
Why Whack-A-Moles?

The Whack-A-Mole paintings began with research for a series of paintings based on the arcade cabinets of the 80s and 90s. I kept redrawing the form to build muscle memory before committing the idea to a group of canvases I'd stretched ahead of time, all of which were 60" x48", limiting the space I had to place the object. The form of an arcade cabinet is deceptively simple; sketching them straight on is theoretically a matter of stacking one box on top of the other, but when you factor in the sides, the control panel, the marquee, and the perspective of the viewer, a whole bunch of technical issues pop up. I wanted the cabinets to be frontal, the way they are seen standing in front of them in an arcade, but while attempting to translate the drawings, I kept running out of space to fit the whole cabinet on the canvas. Every attempt I made would obscure the control panel, or the sides would not face forward, and I went back to the drawings to find a solution.

Looking through the arcade cabinets I had been sourcing, I found a few where I'd only drawn out the form of the lower cabinet, and in a few, I'd just messed up their perspective altogether. Instead of being straight on, the perspective was above. Likewise, some of the cabinets were not rectilinear prisms but had sides that tapered inward to make the side panels visible from the front. I started thinking of a type of arcade counsel design called a cabaret cabinet (intended for restaurants and ski lodges) designed to have the screen flat, the cabinet with no back, and the machine intended the player to work from an overhead stance. These machines reminded me of the Whack-A-Mole games popular with children's funhouses, Chuck-e Cheeses, or county fairs. I thought to myself, "Well, I've never seen a painting of an arcade cabinet, but I damn sure have never seen a painting of a Whack-A-Mole machine," and that's where the idea for the Whack-A-Moles began.

The Arcade and the Altar

When working on the Whack-A-Moles, I wanted them to fill the whole composition and be as large as possible. To avoid a flat and poster-like image, I placed them slightly away from the edge to give them space. It was a claustrophobic or confronting space, but that slight separation between form and edge gave the paintings a sense of illusionistic depth. It allowed the image to happen in a recessed space, like the stalls in a literal arcade. Painting the rest was like trying to fill the area inside a room that already had a smaller room inside; it was like working around an obstruction.

In these paintings, beyond the apparent notes of nostalgia and sentimentality, I was trying to create an anchor, something concrete and sturdy, that I could dress with content. The Whack-
A-Mole cabinet became a type of shelf to set that content on, and the relationships of those things combined could generate a certain narrative intent. Choosing that content was like hitting a metaphorical random button. With the substrate constructed, I decorated it with cultural symbols to imply puzzling relationships that encourage the viewer to add things up to understand the meaning of the thing.

The main form, resting in its shallow background, the Whack-A-Mole, was less like a machine at the arcade and more like the altar in a shrine. The space around it was limited, but it felt like the tunnel vision you get worshiping something. The content populating the pictures is like reliquary, the celebration of a recently defunct zeitgeist or an oddly curated display of that fissure where adolescence meets adulthood. I felt it was appropriate that the more I painted these machines, the more their original function became obsolete. They became totems to the fading arcade culture I experienced as a child, melting away into a cultural ethos’s abandoned voids.

Whack-A-Mole 1

The first painting, titled Whack-A-Mole (because it was the first and the aptest representation of the arcade machine), is oddly placed in the composition. It is slightly tilted, with the front plane penetrating the bottom edge of the composition. The front and side panels are slimy greens and shades of yellow-green interrupted by the symbols of a closed purple fist and a pink thumbs up. The background is a dark veil, and the acid green, pink, and yellow-green machine emits a fading aura of violet light into that veil, implying its powers are running out.

I placed things that are winnable at a county fair or game room in the holes on the trapezium plane atop the cabinet. The prizes are Donald Duck (a reference to Peter Saul,) Drippy, the black mold creature with sad eyes from Aqua Teen Hunger Force, a plush seahorse, cotton candy, and an eerie green taco. The upper part of the cabinet is a smiling pink, mustached man with deep laugh lines; his eyes obscured by a marquee that reads partially as WHACK in dots of red. The rest of this marquee is blocked by an airy white sun hat, checked with green wicker that’s proximity to the edge of the canvas adds to the close tension of the pictorial space.

The surface of this Whack-A-Mole is soft and thin, the result of delicate layers of glazing that give the painting a hazy, atmospheric feel. The color is garish and bright, partially inspired by a combination of the color palette of 80s arcade cabinets and my father’s dirt bike magazines. The pinkish figure in the background is my mustached face, and when the symbols of the entire cabinet add up, it explains a type of autobiographical narrative. With its luridly
inviting smile, thumbs up, and holstered hammer, the painting says, "these are the things I like; you should try them too."
Figure 12. Whack-A-Mole 1, 60"x48", Miles Kinney, 2021
The Scottish Basketball Team.

With the last painting in this series, The Scottish Basketball Team, I was focused on increasing the complexity of the composition and dedicating more effort to the layering of the content. I became interested in how things overlap, interact and become more intrinsically tethered. By this point in the series, a natural evolution in the paintings preceding this final iteration, the location of these machines began to increase in purpose. The resulting spaces became the cluttered corner of a basement, an overgrown field, or an abandoned section of fence. The Whack-A-Moles were becoming forgotten things with domestic backgrounds. Recently used but left behind in some mass exodus.

The theme of this painting is one of contradiction and dysfunction. It's a visual puzzle where the absurdity of a thing invalidates its usefulness. The backboard, surrounded with spikes, threatens to puncture any ball thrown off target. The basketballs are cube-shaped arrow targets, so not only are they too soft to bounce, but they would never fit into the rim. The front of the cabinet is a Scottish Flag, with the X dead center in the composition, but a horizontal strip of wood obscures it with vertically oriented ping pong paddles, a shaving brush, crosscut saw, and a zydeco necktie nailed to it. In the foreground is a broken skateboard in vulgar positioning. To its left is an Aztec war club (called a Macuahuitl) bordered by rounded obsidian stones and the inset spaces decorated with an abandoned lazy boy, a fiery Beavis, and a photograph of the Loch Ness monster.

The composition feels overwhelmingly congested with these items, but it's not necessarily a mess. The organization of things happens in a structure disguised by the disorder of their arrangement. The objects interact as if in controlled chaos, with forms and shapes simultaneously echoing or repelling their counterpart in the picture plane. The cairn of steaks mimics the verticality of the stacked basketballs. The X of the Scottish flag repeats the diagonal of the Macuahuitl, and then the twin claymores crossed inside the rim. The composition is a large X, one side beginning with the target in the top left, down through the grapefruit to the skateboard, the other starting with the war club and traveling through the right claymore toward the fletching’s of the arrows in the top right. This system links the areas of the composition by orthogonally, keeping the image stable and balanced despite the clutter.
Figure 13. The Scottish Basketball Team, 60"x48", Miles Kinney, 2022
Buffaloed

verb (used with object), buf·fa·loed, buf·fa·lo·ing. Informal.
to puzzle or baffle; confuse; mystify:
He was buffaloed by the problem.
to impress or intimidate by a display of power, importance, etc.:
The older boys buffaloned him.

To be buffaloed means two things; *to puzzle, baffle, confuse or mystify,* and *impress or intimidate by a display of power or importance.* I titled my thesis exhibition *Buffaloed* because I couldn’t think of a more concise word to summarize my feelings about painting. It’s what attracted me to the medium in the beginning and regardless of how much I learn, grow, or change, that befuddled feeling never seems to go away. In titling my thesis Buffaloed, I’m paying homage to that reverence, and in a way, I’m implying gratitude for that endless wonderment.

The works in this thesis resonate with me as the captured moments of that Buffaloed feeling. They are a collection of thoughts, efforts, and criticisms as I navigated what it is to be a painter. To that end, these works are manifestations of my time spent asking, “why am I doing this?” and “how does what I’m doing fit into the ethos of contemporary painting.” I like to think I never got the answers to those questions, or maybe if I did, I just asked myself again with new wisdom learned. If there is an answer to painting, I don’t want to know. The search for my place in that world allows me to explore who I am, and like most new experiences, feeling buffaloed is a part of that.
Buffaloed: Additional Images for Exhibition

Figure 14. Pole Position, Oil on Canvas, 48"x60", Miles Kinney, 2021
Figure 15. War, Oil on canvas, 50"x50", Miles Kinney, 2022
Figure 16. Adults Only, Oil on canvas, 62"x32", Miles Kinney, 2020
Figure 17. The End of the Night, Oil on canvas, 50"x50", Miles Kinney, 2021
Figure 18. Party On, Oil on canvas, 60”x48, Miles Kinney, 2021
Figure 19. A Forgotten Corner, Oil on canvas, 60"x48", Miles Kinney, 2022
Figure 20. Americas Built on Some Bones, Oil on canvas, 70"x56", Miles Kinney, 2020
Figure 21. Punch, Oil on canvas, 50"x46", Miles Kinney, 2022
Figure 22. The Shower Party, Oil on canvas, 48"x60", Miles Kinney, 2021
Figure 23. Clip-Art Crawdad, Oil on canvas, 52"x66", Miles Kinney, 2022
Vita

Miles Kinney, a native of Sidney, New York, received his B.F.A in painting from Pratt Institute in 2016. After growing up in a town of 5000 people, his primary exposure to the world came through various media sources such as music, television, videogames and the artbooks from his local high school. This relationship with media and art history has continued to be the focal point of his works content. Miles plans to receive his masters in August 2022, afterwards he will continue pursuing his lifelong dream of being a college professor as an adjunct for L.S.U’s School of Art and Design.