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I Want to Believe, But I Can't Tom O'Day

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“I WANT TO BELIEVE, BUT I CAN’T”
TOM O’DAY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
In
Fine Arts

by
Yevgeniy Ampleyev
B.F.A., Eastern Washington University, 2002
May, 2006

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Abstract

This Thesis is an overview of the processes and practices that I employed for transferring abstract ideas into concrete visual forms, while I was in the graduate program at the University of New Orleans. The description is accompanied by images of the works; they follow in the order they made.

Introduction

Considering the diversity of art forms today, it is impossible to form an objective definition of Art, or even to list the standards for making, viewing, and understanding an art work. Contemporary art making is bound to be a highly subjective experience. My strategy consists of connecting my past with my present, and, while considering the peculiarity of time, to create visually engaging work. By taking a personal approach to painting, I don't seek to convey any special message to my audience. Rather, my hope is to stimulate some softening or agitation in the viewer, who, on any level of perception, engages visually and associates freely with my work. While in graduate school, I turned my attention toward ancient icon painters as I am fascinated by their persistence in achieving the desired effect by any means possible (considering that they worked under the strict rules of a canon). After all, Art does symbolize the meaning of our existence.

1. Prologue

Before I enrolled in graduate school, I had an experience that greatly influenced my relationship with painting. For many weeks I worked on a fairly large piece and I couldn't "get it right." My mind had been occupied by somber and palpitating ideas derived from the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Anselm Kiefer. I changed my subject matter almost daily, and each day ended in complete frustration, which was intensified by the size of the piece. Every time I had a session with this painting, I ended up reworking the whole surface. Nothing was working. I tried to force a synthesis of form and content, but the results were woeful.

One day, after a painting session like that, I was driving through the Palouse backcountry in Eastern Washington. I stopped at the crossroads for a red light and I saw a little cow farm across the street. It was late in the fall and some of the grass had already started to turn color. There was a cow laying on the ground and chewing its cud with its eyelids closed or semi-closed. The cow's mouth opened and closed with monotonous rhythm; it captivated me. I stared into the cow's black hole mouth. I didn't think, just stared. I went back to the studio and painted a huge human head with a cow's snout in place of its human nose, lips and chin (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Cabeza de Vaca, 2002



The human eyes were closed and the cow's mouth was open. There was black and blue under the eyes; rose-like animal ears appeared amid loose human hair. The impression of the painted image was reminiscent of my experience of staring at the cow. I completed the painting within a few hours, and finished it with a delicate white flower on a green stem that both joined and balanced on the cow's nose. The painting and my experience were inseparable: the painting was my experience.

It was at that time I realized that painting didn't need to be a synthetic activity or a quest. Instead, I thought that painting could be a direct impression of an experience, visual poetry, just as a written poem is an impression of the poet's experience. I have formed the concept of "painter," in a pure sense, as a mind experiencing images.

Shortly after completing this work, I had another experience with painting which confirmed my previous considerations. I had painted "Mr. Boney-Nose" (Fig. 2). In this

Fig. 2 Mr. Boney - Nose and Ham, 2002



work, what was supposed to be the human nose resembled instead a chicken leg with the bare bone jutting out forward. A big ham was adjacent to the left side of the head. The section of ham was depicted on the same plane as the human face and the ham bone receded backward. The eyes were represented by two white balls painted where eyes would normally be, but one of the balls was situated right on the border between the head

would normally be, but one of the balls was situated right on the border between the head and the ham. Logically it still belonged to the face, but physically it belonged neither to the face nor the ham or it belonged to both simultaneously. The strict horizontal placement of the lips left the expression of the face emotionless. A little flame crowned the top of the ham. I had painted the whole image at the center of a rectangular canvas and against a monochromatic and odd-blue background. The piece was either about profound awareness or dead-end confusion. This ambiguity gave me the idea to look for “doubt” as a subject for my painting.

2. Integrity and Doubt

Keeping in mind a concept of visual poetry, some doubt and the desire to broaden my painting experience, I embarked on my graduate studies at the University of New Orleans. Driving from Spokane to New Orleans made me believe that I had physically transferred to a different place. When I met with the faculty and fellow graduate students, I realized that I was in a different art world. Immediately I found myself surrounded by a sea of new information about artists, aesthetics and criticism. The difference between the language of criticism that we used at Eastern Washington University, where I received my BFA degree, and what we used at UNO was especially noticeable. At Eastern we talked about finding a subjective and personal language of expression; at UNO we discussed the freedom of an artist to choose a style and that “integrity” was the ability to maintain this freedom of choice.

I wanted to preserve my integrity and represent my own style. I thought about authenticity and plagiarism. I realized the negative connotation of the concept of plagiarism really threatened my artistic freedom. At the same time I was hesitant to allow any influences to permeate into my work from the outside art world. Because I wanted to preserve my integrity I chose to look for ideas within my own materials. Such materials included an accumulated pile of my old drawings. From time to time I would draw from observation: plants, houses, people, rocks and so on. I would often draw with a technique which one Russian artist called “onslaught”: I thought I had to “kill” the paper with quick, energetic lines, and by doing so I aimed to discharge myself onto the white surface. These drawings were vigorous and appeared one-sided because they didn’t bear any evidence of the analytical function of the brain. I copied them meticulously with the help of a grid and reduced the sizes of the original drawings by a scale of 1:2 or 1:3. The nature and the quality of the lines were preserved and the grid was left visible. The new drawings were only about two by three inches. I didn’t consider the grid to be a part of the drawings but

merely a clue for the viewer. Even though the new drawings possessed an appearance of spontaneity, their intimate size and the grids visibility disclosed an artificiality of the seemingly authentic quality of the line. In my initial drawings, the possibility of recreating a desirable effect had forced me to doubt the sincerity of my expression. I then thought about treating “purity of expression” as a subject matter for painting. I have repeated the process of copying my original drawings with oil paint. In doing so I used gessoed mat board (as opposed to artist’s canvas) as my surface in order to emphasize that nothing else but purity matters. The unprepared quality of the surface seemed to underline the rawness of the genuine expression.

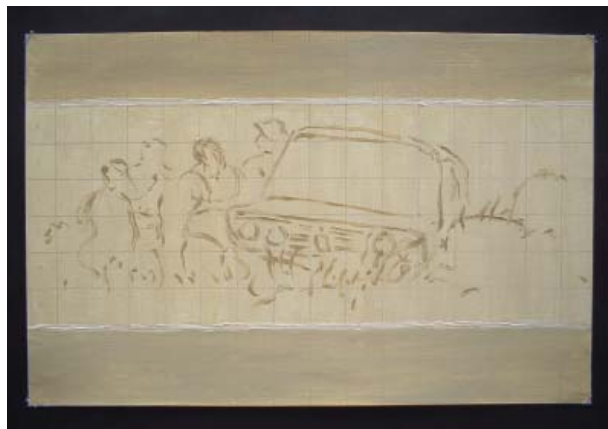
For my first painting I chose a very loose and gestural drawing of fields in the Palouse country of Eastern Washington. I covered an entire 14” x 20” mat board with the background color and then applied the grid by scratching through the layer of oil paint to the gesso. Then the drawing was copied accurately with a paint brush using another color wet-on-wet technique. I decided to smear the background paint in order to partially conceal the grid. I believed that the obviousness of the grid, which complimented my drawings, would interfere with my intention to represent a purity of expression in the painting. The completed painting gave the impression of a genuine experience, but the remnants of the grid created an unorthodox feeling of doubt and some uncertainty about the original intention (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Palouse, 2003



After this piece was completed, I made a few more paintings using the same idea, and they too, were based on the drawings I did before graduate school. The idea of having a frame within the works itself became important to me for some unknown reason. I painted a certain kind of frame on each of these paintings. Most of the frames were thin stripes of color painted along the perimeter of the surface, but on one piece I painted two wide horizontal stripes on the top and bottom of a rectangle, so an active part with the grid was depicted on the middle area which was only slightly wider than the stripes on the top and on the bottom. Two thin white horizontal lines were placed right on the conjunctions of the middle stripe with its neighbor top and bottom stripes. There was no frame on the sides, the painting reminded me of a screen and produced a cinematographic effect (Fig. 4). Time unrolled from left to right, an effect emphasized by the compression of the painted field at the top and bottom.

Fig. 4 Fiolent, 2003



While working on these paintings, I made more drawings at New Orleans's Audubon Park. Once I saw a woman jogging, who was pushing a baby stroller in front of her as she was running. The baby's body was tense and its face expressed utter frustration. The whole scene made an impression of an annoying greasy stain. Later in the shower, I noticed a discolored, pale yellowish stain on the bluish plastic wall. I immediately connected

this to my experience in the Audubon Park and I conceived a painting that would include both experiences (Fig. 5). I painted an 18'' x 24'' sheet of milk carton paper with some odd-blue color and then added a pale yellowish frame along the four edges of the sheet. By mixing stand oil with the paint, I produced a glossy effect in order to emphasize my experience of an annoyance. In the middle of the bluish field, using a grid, I painted a copy of my drawing of the frustrated baby in the stroller. The depiction of the baby was linear, done with a narrow brush and the yellowish color of the frame (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5 Stain, 2003



Fig. 6 Stain, detail, 2003



3. Artifacts

At this point I would like to provide a short overview of some of the cultural artifacts which I think in one way or another have some common ground with my work.

* * *

Norwegian author Erlend Loe writes mostly about facts of everyday life. Existential and skeptical at the same time, his stories resemble a journal, accurately capturing an experience of being a human being. The main character doubts everything, and especially distrusts the accustomed “grown-up” method of dealing with life. Skeptical of himself and the world around him, his perception of complicated things is childish. The hero of Loe’s “Naïve.Super” is a 25-year-old lyrical type who weighs over 70 kilograms and consists of 45 liters of water and fat, enough to produce 70 bars of soap, enough iron for a two inch nail, the carbon for 2000 pencils, phosphor for 2200 matches, a spoonful of magnesium, and enough chalk to paint a henhouse. As the narrative unfolds, he finds out about the structure of the universe, the existence of time, and how to acquire things that he misses: plans for the future, inspiration, girlfriend, charm, his wristwatch, and feelings. The naïve language with which Loe handles eternal existential questions brings lightness to his prose, and associates it with “naïve” painting, for example, by the artist Marcel Dzarma.

The concept of using an “un-artful” form of expression (language) takes my mind to Andrej Platonov, a Russian writer of the 20th century. Platonov’s language is not expected but is rather intentionally awkward: it is fabricated by the author out of “incompliant” words which by their “wrong-ness” act upon the reader. It feels as if the authors, in his endeavor to inform an audience, aims at something significant and always slightly misses. He gets close enough, though, for a reader to fill in the gap. Platonov’s preoccupation with death as a subject matter, which is then embodied in his intentionally inept language - in my opinion - makes his prose as contemporary as the paintings by Luc Tuymans, a Belgian artist, famous for his deceptive techniques and the obscure content of his work.

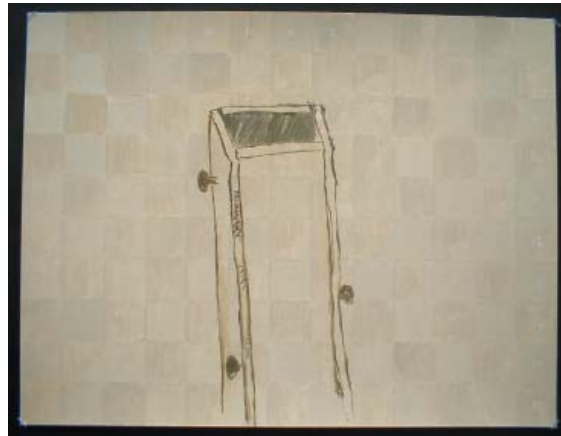
Michael Krebber, the Cologne artist, also uses “the gaps” as a means of communicating with an audience:

“Some say Michael Krebber doesn’t translate to New York, but a painter who “prefers not to” isn’t exactly going to meet the demands of a city powered by big, dumb painting head on. All the paint in Krebber’s last two shows here couldn’t fill one small canvas by Dana Schutz or John Currin. “Flags (Against Nature)” and then, only six months later, “Here it is: The Painting Machine” (both at Green Naftali in 2003), Krebber demonstrates here and here again that the proof is not in the paint job but in the idea that puts it at a fresh distance. Just as Paul Valery called the poem “a prolonged hesitation between sound and sense,” Krebber’s practice could be described as an ongoing hesitation between repetition and interruption (or between having an idea and having no idea). It’s never been a question of how well or hard he labors on a canvas, a show, or a style; it’s all in the ways he uses painting as a strategy for extricating himself from the wrong kind of work – both the bad works that surround him and the bad works he, like anybody, is capable of – or from the demands of work, period... Krebber himself has remarked, “I do not believe I can invent something new in art or painting because whatever I would want to invent already exists.” (Artforum, Oct. 2005.)

4. Invisible Threads

Invisible threads that penetrate reality make secret connections between things and events. Wind blows through the black square hollows of a nine-story building that is eternally under construction. There is a mystery behind its wooden construction fence. In my memory there are endless paper ads glued to a fence along the dark, frozen street as my mother walked me silently to a kindergarten early in the morning. We are mincing on the black ice. A few hot crepes and some tea are warming up from the inside. The history of vagabondage germinated in the black square hollows. Only a few years later “Black Swan with White Wings,” (the local criminal) speechless and sad took me around construction sites. Vagabondage expanded to the recycling station for glass bottles. Old wooden boxes, stained - almost soaked, with alcohol disperse a spicy smell into the air. This smell was the substance of the place. Bottle caps lay around in the mud here and there. I looked for a subject of interest, roaming around and picking up desirable caps. Then I would take them to the nearest rail track and put them where the streetcar would flatten them. In graduate school I roamed around the dark boxes of studio spaces, looking for a subject of interest, an idea for my work. I ended up using some sculptures of fellow graduate students as models for my paintings. A sensation of “hollowness” was present in these paintings. The “abandoned” and “eternal construction” became the subject of one of my works. Here, instead of making the grid a visible clue to the procedure of making a painting, I painted the grid as an active ingredient of the piece (Fig. 7). I also painted numbers on the vertical margin and horizontal rows. The colors were dim but the surface had a slippery-shine. On that background I loosely painted an object that resembled an oblong wooden box with some nails sticking out of it. I painted it with a marshy-green; the size of the painted object constituted about one tenth of the whole surface. The object was clearly in focus, but the sketchiness of its representation and the solidity of the grid produced a humorous effect of naughtiness in the system.

Fig. 7, Construction de John, 2003



The best of the best were allowed to lay flowers at the base of our chief's monument. The thirty-foot pedestal was made of red granite. A massive bronze statue of our chief stood at the top of the pedestal. When I was the same height as the first step of the pedestal, I pulled my mom's hand away from this representation of our social and political system. The system tends to stick to individual's nape, back, and along the spine down to the ass, like a piece of duct tape sticks to a lizard. I wasn't allowed to lay flowers at the base of the monument and this rejection made my heart poignant. In the dusty corner of my graduate studio space, I once found a little gecko stuck to a piece of duct tape. The little guy was all dried-up, its mouth wide open and it showed an obvious effort to escape from the tape. Its swollen stomach, muscular tension, and tiny pieces of excrements behind its body carried a clear message: the individual (gecko) didn't give up until the last beat of its heart. I painted the lizard's head and part of its shoulders on a 20" x 24" piece of stretched linen (Fig. 8). About a year later I took the painting off the stretcher frame, spread the previously folded edges, and presented it loose on the wall.

The depiction of the dead animal was oddly different from my depictions of any other subjects and especially the inanimate ones I had painted before. It seemed that it didn't have the essential substance the other paintings had: a pursuit of life. I noticed then, that for me the representation of inanimate objects was (beyond an original intention) an effort

Fig. 8 Lizard, 2004



to animate them in my work. I decided to elaborate on the idea of removing the “pursuit of life” from the representations in my work. The most interesting subject for this concept seemed to be a human portrait. My aunt taught history and the theory of Marxism-Leninism. She had great stamina, which drove her through her life and resulted in a vivid sparkle in her eyes. I painted a large-scale portrait of my aunt while removing that spark (Fig. 9). To do this, I omitted the representation of pupils from her eyes. I depicted the rest of her face with inconsistent brushstrokes; the paint was translucent enough to expose the surface beneath it. It seemed that the whole image was ready to disintegrate into pieces or to dissolve into a grey mass. These portraits - the lizard and my aunt, though different in subject - seemed very much alike. The visual and physical combination and transformation of one into another and back seemed highly possible. The represented subjects didn't contain energy within themselves, but the technique celebrated painting's ability to simulate extraction of energy. It possessed energy to extract an appearance of energy. Energy brought the idea of using food as a concept in my work.

The crepe is a carrier of energy in the cold morning and is also a symbol of the sun in pagan-Slavic mythology. The Slavs deified the sun, it became the god Dazhdbog, and I made a crepe in order to use it as a subject for my painting. I transferred the image of the crepe to a 24'' x 30'' sheet of gessoed paper using a grid and then painted it from the front as a greenish-brownish-grey sun floating in an obscure whitish space (Fig. 10). This painting complimented the previous two, completing an odd succession: human – dead animal – piece of food.

Fig. 9 Aunt, 2004



Fig. 10 Crepe, 2004



Nonsensically, images of puddles began to appear in my mind. Coincidentally, I began to experience some wetness in my feet, and this was strong enough to form an association. When I was coming home from school in my native town of Nikolaev, my feet were very often wet. Lumps of dirt would stick to my shoes and my pants were consistently stained with mud up to my knees. My mother wasn't happy; I tried to walk with my legs far apart, but ultimately dirt would find me and stick to me. We didn't live in a rural area, but in a city with roads and sidewalks. My affinity with mud was triggered by something other than inconvenience.

I have a few memories inseparable from dirt and puddles. One comes from my early years and is surrounded by darkness. In the middle that darkness I can see a wet, dead cat, lying in mud and infested by a mountain of maggots. I see myself sitting near and staring - experiencing the smell.

The next memory is still from my childhood. A crowd of kids and teenagers huddle around a large puddle watching a snake floating in the dirty water. I'm staring at the snake, trying to escape the rocks flying at it from all sides. Some of the children hit the target and the body begins to squirm. Then somebody hits the snake on the head with a firm, high heel. Some time passes and from under the surface of the water appears what used to be a head, but now is a flat, red biomorphous shape that begins to hiss and somehow sticks out a forked tongue. I'm heartbroken and can't stop staring. With a few more rocks the snake finally dies and I run home, crying. The warmth of the sunlight was diffused into our kitchen through the transparent cotton curtains, and it shocked me. My parents appeared to be under the spell of this light. They did not know about what just happened outside.

The last episode with puddles came a few years later. When a friend and I were on our way home from school, a construction worker stopped us and handed us a reproduction of a portrait of our previous leader, Leonid Brezhnev, who was dead by then. He explained that he was working in a house, that would be demolished, and that the portrait of our leader needed to be saved. He asked us to take the reproduction home to our parents. We listened to him and took the portrait, but when he disappeared around the corner we let the image float in a puddle and threw rocks at it. Out of nowhere the worker reappeared, this time running toward us, screaming out invectives and shaking a piece of plywood above his head. He chased us around the puddle with the destroyed image in it, and luckily we got away. The worker pulled the wet paper from the puddle, and, cursing, rushed away.

These seemingly irrelevant events form a chain that has made a strange impact on my work. In one way I was curious to connect my experiences in order to construct a historical reality and find its connection, perhaps by applying a cause and effect relation,

logic or analogy. In other words, in order to reconstruct my historic reality in my work, I needed to apply some systematic thinking. In another way I could accept myself as reality and stop constructing logical connections that meant stopping being interested in my own opinions about my reality.

While uncertain about my preference for one or the other, I began to doubt the possibility of choosing subject matter or in the significance of subject matter in my work at all. I thought that anything could be represented; it is only a matter of how. In this state of uncertainty, I found myself lying on the floor and holding one of my hands up in the air. I remembered that I saw gorillas in a zoo making the same gesture, but with one of their legs. They didn't seem to be certain about anything either. I had been lying down with my hand in the air for a substantial period of time. I thought that if the statue of our chief could lie down on its back, the chief's hand would also be pointing to the sky. I asked my son to pose for me, and made a drawing of him lying down with this hand pointing up. I considered this pose a fundamental expression of unconventional behavior and I've decided to treat it as a subject for my work.

Keeping in my mind the idea of constructing a historical reality, I chose a brick as a fundamental unit of construction. On one side of it, I painted an image in watercolor, of this unsystematic behavior with a hand pointed upward. I then surrounded the brick with a piece of glamorous artificial white fur (placing the brick so its painted side was visible on the top), and I turned a glass baking pan upside down, covering the brick and the fur entirely and leaving the upper, painted part of the brick visible through the bottom of the baking pan. Fur was sticking out under the sides of the pan, giving the impression of furriness. This was the complete piece (Fig. 11). It looked like a shiny, fluffy grave but peremptorily moody. The image of a man lying down with one hand up in the air, the glamour of the fur, and the seemingly absurd act of warming the brick were separated from the rest of the world by the solid glass of the baking pan. The piece seemed self-contained and independent. One important element was the rhythm: brick-fur-baking pan, one-two-three!

Fig. 11, Untitled, 2004



The simplicity of the rhythm produced the effect of an economy as well as lightness of expression. By lightness of expression I mean the effect that all the ingredients of a piece seem to belong together naturally and without being forced. These ingredients being disentangled from the reality of the physical world were bound together as a necessary combination. Images appear in the moment of detachment from the constructed self, the poetry of images. Images are come and go and the consciousness doesn't hold on to them. Any reproduction of the images is a journey into the past to the moment of the first appearance of an image. Such a journey is possible by means of memory. If the memory of an appearance of an image is clear, the representation will be most exact. If an image in memory is partially washed-out, then what is represented is an excavation of an image. During an excavation another detachment of the self can occur and then a new image gets superimposed on the excavation of another one.

5. Lightness, Faith, and Failure

Once I saw a representation of a leaping deer on a truck decorated for Mardi Gras. The deer was leaping over a fence near a barn and a tree. The simplicity of the subject and the technique of representation attracted me, and I decided to do a drawing of the deer (Fig. 12).

Fig. 12 Reed, 2005



I used a 24” x 36” sheet of a newsprint paper, positioned vertically, and two colored pencils (white and burnt sienna) to draw a deer leaping forward in a three-quarter view. In my drawing, however, I replaced the deer’s tail with its head and attached the tail to its neck. Instead of placing the deer in its expected element, I omitted “natural” environment and covered the background with monotonous grey hatching. As a result – and even though my deer was represented moving forward towards the viewer – the reversal of its head and a tail suggested movement in the opposite direction. The drawings vertical orientation physically blocked any suggestion of movement. Instead it created a sensation of a physical and mental suspense, which was reinforced by visual complexity, and the

obscurity of the grey field of hatching. Dimness, the result of the combination of pencils on a newsprint paper conveyed a feeling of frustration. The fragile paper was abused not physically but by the magnitude of the message. Therefore lightness was emphasized indirectly. I titled the drawing “Reed” in order to reinforce the idea of mental suspense. The main message of the piece was a lack of belief in any necessity of moving in either of the suggested directions.

Once I observed little particles of dust, which were slowly crossing through a beam of light in my room. The light was flowing through the gap between the curtains and the dust motes passed by, all in a certain direction and magnificently, like airships. My fascination with lightness is specified by my desire to remove any trace of heaviness from my work. In pursuit of lightness I conceived a series of paintings on “Chinette,” oval paper picnic plates. I gessoed the plates and used a monochromatic palette to paint an image of a person engaged in some peculiar activity. A few of the paintings had one common element: the protagonist stared from his world directly at the viewer. These plates humorously suggested an absurd existential mood through the feigned seriousness of subject matter and the lighthearted choice of materials. In one of the paintings there was a man who stands

Fig. 13, Untitled, 2005



on one leg while spreading his hands far apart and bends his torso forward (Fig. 13). His other leg is bent backward into the distance. The man’s eyes are wide open and he stares meaningfully at the viewer. Loose hair and an unbuttoned suit suggested the sublimity

of the “man’s” personality, but the nature of this sublimity is questionable. Regardless of their activities and together with the sublimity of their personalities, every personage on the plates radiated a killing boredom. The depictions of bored people coincide with the general feeling of effortlessness, or lightness in the plate’s executions.

Nourishing the idea of lightness of execution, I began to imagine how “light” a work needs to be in order to fail. I wanted to represent the possibility of failure and considered a hard logic, a carelessness of execution and the use of frustrating materials as necessary ingredients. In my first “failure” drawing I decided to address an environmental issue (Fig. 14). I used vine charcoal to draw a huge forefinger on an 18” x 24” sheet of newsprint paper. I drew it in detail and with harsh lines. I filled the paper around the finger with stylized flowers represented by loose circles surrounded by petals. The flowers were drawn using blue and orange colored pencils. In some of the flowers the circles were blue and the petals orange, and in others vice-versa.

Another drawing was accomplished in the same manner and by using the same materials. An awkward depiction of a human hand showing the western gesture that symbolizes “OK” filled the drawing’s foreground. I covered the background with very loose hatching in orange pencil. I have titled this work “US Okays the Orange Revolution in Ukraine” (Fig. 15).

Fig. 14, Untitled, 2005



Fig. 15, US Okays, 2005



6. Towards an Icon

At this point I felt that my random choice of subject matter disperses my attention toward Russian icon painting. I felt a need to focus on a theme I've been interested in ever since I first discovered painting. It fascinated me how the depiction of the prophets faces transmitted their inner condition precisely. Their simplicity was astonishing. Even though the often awkward application of paint might be considered primitive, especially in relationship to the contemporary Italo-Byzantine tradition, behind this awkwardness there was a real mastery as well as the author's undoubted belief in his own inner nature.

Fig. 16, Untitled, 2005



I chose a portrait of a distant relative as the subject for my newest painting. He used to be a soldier in a band of anarchists, and his gaze expressed a determination that looked similar to the faith I saw in the ancient icons. I painted an image on stretched and gessoed white linen with acrylic paint (Fig. 16). It is a three-quarter-view bust. I left his face blank and covered it with pink paint. I have noticed a strong similarity between this portrait and my memory of the Black Swan, whose pale feminine face was framed by his long hair.

A huge sheep's skin hat crowned the head in the portrait. The Black Swan was robbing people off their expensive fur hats. I finished the piece by painting two transparent blue stripes along the vertical sides of the surface. The painting possesses some evasive qualities, and is strangely appealing. Upon it's completion I felt as though an unknown base moved under my feet. I felt that new possibilities opened up to me and I have decided to summarize my experience in a new work.

Fig. 17, Quiet Pleasures, 2005



I conceived a synthetic painting about the quiet pleasure of being secure, of having a base under one's feet (Fig. 17). This is oil on canvas, forty inches tall and thirty-six inches wide. The imagery derived from the sarcastic idea, once expressed by the artist B. Wurtz that the three important things in life are sleeping, eating and staying warm. These, in my opinion, are the three most important ingredients in complacency, the quiet satisfaction with an on-going and secure situation. The entire surface of the canvas is covered with a design, borrowed from a bed sheet given to me by my mother. It consists of stylized pale blue flowers situated on a pale yellow background. A large, pale crepe is suspended in the middle of the composition, the crepe situated little higher than the intersection of the diagonal axis.

Directly on the crepe I've depicted two praying children, a boy and a girl. The depiction of the children is a stylized, conventional logotype. The boy is cozily dressed in a homey outfit. The red turtleneck shirt is tucked tidily into his green pants. The girl is clothed in an old-fashioned blue dress with a white apron on top. Both children pray with their eyes closed and their hand held together in a gesture of submission. The technical devices included the use of stand oil, which gave the paint some glossiness and transparency, allowing partial surface coverage, and permitting the pencil marks to show through. As a result, the painting expresses a ridiculous visualization of complacency.

Conclusion

At this point I am more concerned with how particular formal devices can trigger broader thematic meanings. My plan is to continue to lie on the floor while balancing my hand up in the air. Between these sessions of lying down I am going to investigate further the tradition of a Russian icon painting. By doing this I hope to find more invisible threads that penetrate my reality. Ultimately these discoveries will become subjects for my future work in New York.

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Vita

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