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Transmutational Harmony

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Transmutational Harmony

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

Jonathan Joseph Mayers

B.F.A. Louisiana State University, 2007

May, 2011

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents, Hans and Sharron Mayers, my sister, Jennifer Mayers, my paternal grandparents, Jerome and Gladys Spinato, and my maternal grandparents, Clyde and Gertrude Brown. My family has always encouraged me to pursue my art and I remain very grateful for their support.

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ABSTRACT

The work that I have produced during my graduate studies at the University of New Orleans addresses the impact that humans have on the environment in our contemporary world. A primary focus, but not exclusive, includes industrial materials or objects, their overwhelming presence that informs the juxtaposition of economic progress, and the reality of environmental disruption. Humor and metaphor are central themes of my work and reference my personal observations and experiences of living in the midst of these environments. Sources from Contemporary underground art have been filtered through my exposure to studio practice and art history, mainly the autonomous processes of Surrealism, resulting in a variety of influences that inform my work. I present imaginary images of architectural, biological, and mechanical transformations with the hopes of nudging the viewers' expectations and to create a better understanding of my opinion pertaining to the world and reality we all live in.

Contemporary art, Surrealism, environmental disruption, Godzilla, silverpoint, painting, automatic drawing, automatism, amorphous, biomorphic

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will discuss my paintings and silverpoint drawings in the context of contemporary Louisiana's ongoing growth and environmental disruption. I will also discuss the experimentations on paper that led to a more exciting discovery in a new visual language of my inner dialogue. During my undergraduate studies at LSU, I began to paint cartoon-based narratives that attempted to address the culture and fragile environment of the southern region of Louisiana. These images served as a metaphor for the conflict between civilized and natural environments. I referenced elements of popular culture by including objects and themes relating to video games and gaming, which were personal interests of mine. My passion for illustrating my concerns was born during my undergraduate education and eventually became the foundation for the ideas I developed during graduate school approximately a year later.

At that particular time I had a great interest in representational cartoon image narratives that were influenced by Contemporary Pop Surrealist artists such as Greg "Craola" Simkins, Jeff Soto, Mark Ryden, and Alex Pardee. My work, like theirs, is infused with imaginative characters that address or reference images, ideas, and events true to life. While in my first semester of graduate school, I was introduced to Surrealist, Max Ernst, and his experimentation with decalcomania. This is a process where Ernst would spread paint on a wooden surface and then mash another material against the wet paint. Before the paint sets up to dry, he would remove the material that was used to create texture, creating a magnificent spontaneous surface to react to and paint on. I was intrigued by his process and decided to create my own process using watercolor, spit, paintbrushes, and jars to create different textures on paper. In my works that started with this process, certain forms naturally materialized and were rendered into distinct

objects. As I began drawing and painting back into the textures I had created, an emergence of floral forms, biomorphic entities, and mechanical constructions began to appear in a seemingly anonymous environment.

My artwork progressed to larger works emphasizing large creatures, emerging from these environmental spaces, which resemble various forms of sea-life. The idea introduced my consideration for the mutation of creatures in our region as a result of pollution in our waterways. My worry about pollution in Louisiana mirrors the concern the Japanese had involving their environment after the accident at Bikini Atoll and the bombing of Hiroshima, which played a major role in developing the idea behind the movie “Gojira,” known as Godzilla: King of the Monsters in America. I will discuss this later in chapter two.

Throughout my life as an artist, I have felt compelled to learn new processes, including those of the old masters. Their glazing techniques and paint application found their way into a few of my works, but when the artist, Steve Prince, introduced silverpoint, a type of metalpoint drawing, to me, I truly became enthralled. Steve Prince was a visiting artist who had an exhibition in our campus gallery and was asked to give a talk and demonstration on his drawing techniques, including silverpoint. He revealed to us that silverpoint was a type of drawing process used by old masters that involved making marks on a prepared surface using a silver stylus. He demonstrated the preparation of his drawing surface by creating a ground using a mixture of zinc white powder, rabbit skin glue, and water that was heated in a pot then brushed onto a piece of paper or wood panel. This was, by Prince’s definition, the old master’s process of silverpoint surface preparation. The mixture produced a plastic-like drawing surface that reacted well with linear marks and hatching fields. Upon researching silverpoint grounds, I experimented with a mixture of zinc white gouache and Chinese white watercolor to produce a

soft off-white ground, with a fine tooth, which would better serve my artistic needs. My drawing technique employs lighter delicate marks juxtaposed with darker condensed areas of concentrated marks that create a dynamic tonal range and activate the surface area of my drawings. My sporadic drawing informs the work with bursts of life within the perceived environment.

André Bretón equated inspiration with spontaneous creation, meaning the use of unconscious activity in conjunction with surrealist activity would inspire artists' creativity.¹ The processes of automatism, frottage, grattage, and decalcomania are examples of the surrealist activities Bretón was referencing. The Surrealists strove to free the unconscious mind while deciphering the language of dream by use of automatism. Automatism's role was to express the true function of human thought through writing and poetry. Later, the Surrealists attempted to combine automatism's role and concern with aesthetic criteria.

Bretón stated that the "strongest image is that which offers the highest degree of arbitrariness... that which requires the longest time to translate into practical language."² If I am to abide by this rule of surrealist imagery, my silverpoints, which are near wholly realized automatic drawings that are ambiguous in form and space, are by definition successful contemporary surrealist works. The images of sexual desire, obtuse ethereal construction, fragments of human intellect and uncontrolled mutation are revealed in my silverpoints. Through the process of automatic drawing, my unconscious desires birth themselves visually on the drawing surface. The surrealists also "believed that a powerful alternative exists to rational reality, that what lies buried in the unconscious mind – desires, emotions, intuitions, and

¹ Bohn, Willard. *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous*. (New York: New York University Press, 2001.) 133.

² Ibid. 142.

impulses – provide a corrective to a rational Cartesian worldview.”³ I also believe in an alternate reality within our unconscious and attempt to contextualize the ideas of harmony and balance through my unique visual vocabulary.

As an artist, I have a need to express my views and experiences visually. I derive personal fulfillment from visualizing my idea of balance in the contemporary time we live in, which is bombarded daily with new images, information, and updated social information in news media formats and online social networks. My thoughts and experiences are visually manifested in a two-dimensional format. This format includes paper, wood panel, and canvas as my surface materials. I have used an array of mediums including oil paint, acrylic paint, watercolors, gouache, silkscreen and woodblock ink, silverpoint, pen, India ink, pencil, colored pencil, crayons, and spit. The biomorphic images I use in my work are not necessarily pertinent to the region that I live in and remain universal in context. The architectural and industrial designs that I encounter daily are images that are directly connected with the region I live in, but manifest themselves as fragmented forms that leave them open to interpretation.

³ Jennifer Mundy. *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.) 101.

CHAPTER ONE:

MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER

In the beginning of my second semester of graduate school I set aside my narrative paintings to experiment with mixed media on paper. I primed Rives BFK paper with thin layers of gesso then left it free of any preliminary drawing. The paper was tacked to a wall, where I began to paint washes and linear marks of brightly hued watercolors, allowing drips to form and run downward. I began using a straw, blowing through it, to create interesting dispersions of color. This action created an exciting splatter effect on the bottom portion of the work, giving the watercolors a sense of existence and structure on the picture plane.

Along with spitting on the newly painted surface, I threw the paper on the ground, allowing the watercolors to puddle up and create other amorphous shapes. In addition to using brushes to apply and push paint around the surface, I employed my hands and fingertips. I placed jars, cans, and old paintbrushes on the paper, allowing the watercolors to dry around it, to form different interesting textures. I rendered and completed the piece on paper with pen and colored pencil, drawing back into the spontaneous shapes created in the watercolors. The marriage of my drawings and the spontaneous shapes resemble sea-life, mechanical arms and spikes, amorphous flowers, and globular biomorphic entities in an ambiguous space on the surface of the paper. This process allowed my art to grow and expand; moving away from conducting a narrative painting, then influenced my later work.

CHAPTER TWO:

MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER ON PANEL

I do not fear that our waste, oil spills, and disruption of the environment in Louisiana will alter sea-life into gigantic monstrous creatures, but it is my interest in that specific idea, coupled with humor, that informs this series of work. I've employed this idea by creating images of wildlife mutated by oil toxins, previously, in cartoon narrative paintings, prior to my arrival at the University of New Orleans. Along with the mutated sea-life there are other biomorphic elements that resemble globular spores, amorphous flowers, and small coral-like environments. The colors in these works that aren't directly associated with the subject, the larger central creatures, are seemingly vivid and pastel colors represent a humoristic juxtaposition between nature and toxic mutation. The three works of this series are *Ancêtre* (figure 1), *Sporadic Rapture*, *Quillwort* (figure 2), and *Le Voile du Marais* (figure 3).

In conjunction with my concerns of polluting our environment, I thought about its affects on sea-life, such as crawfish and octopi, and began to develop images of them existing in a mutated state, altered with biological elements. I was reminded of how the idea behind the popular culture creature, Godzilla, came to fruition. Ever since I could remember I had been intrigued with the Godzilla series and so, felt compelled to research its origin while creating this series of works. In the original story, after atomic bomb tests were run in Japan, this mutant version of a tyrannosaurus / iguanodon / stegosaurus / alligator hybrid formed in the ocean and became what we see in the films. The movie represented what most citizens of Japan feared after the bombs were dropped in World War II.

In a lecture given by Dr. William M. Tsutsui, a professor of the University of Kansas, revealed that the idea of the Godzilla movie was birthed as a result of atomic age concerns

coupled with Japanese filmmakers taking a good idea from the Warner Bros. Hollywood film, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. In the original Godzilla film, the monster's mutation was due to atomic radiation, presenting an explanation for its size and powers. In March of 1954, a Japanese fishing vessel, *Daigo Fukuruyu Maru* (Lucky Dragon No. 5) strayed into the U.S. nuclear bomb-testing zone near Bikini Atoll. The crew was exposed to "massive amounts of radiation, one crew member died (after a cynical American cover-up), and some of the irradiated tuna on the ship made it onto the market in Japan.... This was big news in Japan (and was called 'the latest atomic bombing of Japan in the media), especially since Hiroshima and Nagasaki remained fresh memories.'" ⁴ I understood these worries of the Japanese and their symbol usage of Godzilla in their films as it relates to the pollution of southern Louisiana's swamps and marshes.

On April 20, 2010, Louisiana was in the news about BP's oil spill disaster, *Deepwater Horizon*, which was the result of the *Deepwater Horizon* offshore oil platform explosion in the Gulf of Mexico. Following the blowout there were weeks and months of disaster clean up and waters closed to fishing because of contamination. There were also plenty of endangered species prone to the threat of the oil spill, such as night sharks, smalltooth sawfish, and 5 species of sea turtles. ⁵ Our state bird, the brown pelican, was just taken off of the endangered species list in 2009 and was also in danger of being affiliated with the list once more. Eventually, the death toll of our wildlife rose while the wetlands and marshlands became disrupted by this oil that resembled chocolate mousse. This kind of disaster is something I have always been concerned about, after seeing other oil spills throughout modern history affecting the sea and wildlife. The

⁴ William M. Tsutsui, "Godzilla and Post-war Japan." UCLA Faculty Center, UCLA International Institute: Asia Institute. 23 May 2005.

⁵ Feb. 2011. "Deepwater Horizon Blowout Facts." 12 May 2010.
<http://www.crrc.unh.edu/deepwater_horizon_blowout/facts.html>

Deepwater Horizon oil spill happened nearly a year after the creation of my mixed media works, but it remains very important in this thesis because it informs this body of work of my focus and opinions on the preservation of our environment while it also relates to the concerns of Japan's vulnerability.

As this thesis is being written, there has been another major environmental disaster in Japan. On March 11 of 2011 an earthquake, with the magnitude of 8.9 on the Richter scale, struck the northern coast of Japan.⁶ The earthquake triggered a massive tsunami that completely devastated and swept away many towns along Japan's coast. As a result of the earthquake and tsunami, inhabitants also face radiation from the explosions and radioactive gas leaks in one of the nation's nuclear plants, which is dangerously vulnerable to nuclear meltdown. The accidents at the Fukushima Daichii Nuclear Power Station, though direct results from a natural occurrence, further reference my ruminations of environmental pollution due to human progress.

The process for these 3 mixed media pieces began with my desire for creating larger watercolor images on paper. I mounted a large piece of paper on the wall and began to apply watercolor washes, letting the medium drip naturally, then using a straw to direct the flow, I blew some of the paint in a preferred direction. I then laid the paper flat on the floor and applied more paint, letting it settle and dry without alteration. This formed peculiar sections of interest in which most of the amorphous flower shapes manifested themselves. I prepared 3 large panels, cut the paper a bit larger than the panel sizes, and then applied small amounts of acrylic medium on the back of the paper in random spots. Before the medium dried, the paper was adhered to the panels, set to dry, and was then physically torn away from the surface. This created an interesting layer of texture between the hard wood and surface of what I had painted on the

⁶ Mar. 15 2011 "The New York Times: Japan – Earthquake and Tsunami (2011)" 15 Mar. 2011.

paper. For me, this act and the visual result was a physical metaphor of man's destruction of the environment.

To create a likeness to commonly seen sterile hues I reference mundane commercial paints, such as those found in hospital rooms, when choosing some of the colors I mix to be used in my paintings. For these works on panel, I imagined a generic color that would reference the banal rooms painted with industrial/commercial paint. This color was mixed using unbleached titanium white, titanium white, and cobalt teal acrylic paints. I made a 3 piece series of mixed media works on panel that, through initial mark making, began to reveal monstrous creatures that resembled sea-life. I then painted this flat color I mixed on the areas where the panel was exposed, making them the space in which the rest of the image would reside. This gave the white of the paper the role of a color, instead of remaining as a background.

CHAPTER THREE:

OIL AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

My family had been a part of the oil industry for decades in Louisiana, exposing me to the equipment used for drilling and its various design elements as well as informing me of the positive and negative stances on the issues that arise regarding the industry. In addition, growing up in Baton Rouge has exposed me to an environment trodden with refineries that expel pollutants every day, creating increasingly poor air conditions in the northern parts of the city along with Mississippi River. On the desk in my grandfather's office at Brown Tool and Supply, Inc., sat a brass oil rig maquette, a piece that I admired, with an oil derrick on its platform. Over some time I developed a fascination with the structure of the oil derrick and what it represents as a symbol. For me, the oil derrick has various meanings that included pride (because my family ran its own successful business in a very important field), respect, and opportunity (because of the many people employed in the oil field), and economic progress (since so many products we used today, such as gasoline and plastic, are made with oil). The negative aspects include arrogance, greed (because of self-absorbed opportunists that favor profit over the protection of our environment), as well as environmental disruption and pollution (such as the Valdez tanker oil spill off the coast of Alaska in 1989 and the more recent Deep Water Horizon oil rig explosion off the coast of Louisiana in 2010). The image of an oil derrick is also closely related to that of a phallus, which I equate with an additional meaning of power. I focused my energy on creating a painting that served to affirm all of these meanings while also keeping the work lighthearted, resulting in *The Sorrow of Derrickzistance* (figure 4).

Following the idea of replicating commercial paint as I had in the previous works on panel, I applied a muted lilac acrylic color, which mimicked the hue of a clinical room that I

visited in my childhood, to serve as the background color. To begin my process of painting, I created gestural expressive marks on the canvas with washes of oil paint. Reacting to the washes, I applied thicker bolder colors of paint with my brush and oil sticks. I painted a drainage pipe, seemingly with large white teeth, expelling a dark waste. An oil derrick stands within the picture plane, drawn with oils sticks, seemingly like a pedestal, displaying a dying cypress tree atop it to represent the disruption of our environment by way of our own economic progress.

CHAPTER FOUR:

SILVERPOINT ON PAPER ON PANEL

The use of silverpoint, one of a few types of the metalpoint drawing technique, plays an important role in this body of work, entitled *lure* (figure 5). These drawings take on a life unto themselves. My artistic process mirrors this in that it is open to surprising transformations that are initially unexpected. The drawing material becomes a physical manifestation of nostalgia and history that relates to its process of oxidization over time, tarnishing the silver, turning the drawing into a sepia tone color. As the chemical process of oxidization occurs, the idea of the forgotten comes to mind. This process ties into our own history of culture and politics, where these ideas are long forgotten and waiting to be rediscovered. I purposefully do not varnish or protect the surface of the silverpoint drawings, neglecting them, because I want to visually display physical disruption. The intention is to allow my silverpoints to evolve over time, even in my absence. The silver will continue to tarnish while the paper surface gradually collects dirt and dust. As a consequence, the paper will deteriorate over time. The silverpoint media is a nod to old masters, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, who employed silverpoint as a drawing medium they used to create sketches and preliminary drawings for paintings. Albrecht Dürer, Joseph Stella, and John Wilde were also known for using this drawing media during their lifetime.⁷

The drawings are executed using the Surrealists' automatic drawing process then reevaluated and refined. The idea of automatism and its relation to the unconscious thought process, relates the works of Surrealists Max Ernst, Andre Masson, and Joan Miró. The use of automatic drawing informs the work with the mental state that I am in personally, interpreting

⁷ Bruce Weber, *The Fine Line: Drawing with Silver in America*. (West Palm Beach: Norton Gallery & School of Art, 1985.)

my thought process visually. Biomorphic objects, unstable architectural structures and biomechanical mechanisms appear out of my drawings, yet retain an ambiguousness that resides in a universal realm, as shown in *lure 1.00 (Carcinojira en Orbital Constance)* and *lure 2.00 (Hot-Wired Larval Troubleshooting)* (figures 6 and 7, respectively).

To begin the drawings I created randomly generated marks on the surface that are in response to some of the forms suggested in the texture of the surface material. I then refined these shapes into biomorphic, architectural, electronic, or mechanical entities depending on what image emerges from my unconscious. The images I use are of objects or experiences I have encountered and visually remain as fragmented versions of each rather than being rendered in a representational form. The marriage between the forms and space they reside in, for me, reference the balance needed to maintain a functional state of being in contemporary times.

Revealing the natural wood on most of the panels the silverpoint drawings are mounted on references using nature literally as an architectural tool. The wood of trees has been abstracted into geometrical forms to create the panel and become overtaken by intentional and unintentionally created drips of gesso that take on the role of an expanding organic space. Most of the pieces in my *lure* series are small in size to imply the intimate nature and delicacy of what exists in the space of the picture plane, as demonstrated in *lure .01 (The Spawning of Dangleborgs)* (figure 8).

The process of creating my silverpoint drawings on paper employs a contemporary preparation method as opposed to the historical method of mixing finely ground dried bones, such as those from chickens, with saliva.⁸ I begin with layering and sanding 3 to 4 thin coats of gesso on Rives BFK or Strathmore paper that have already been torn down to size. I then apply

⁸ Bruce Weber, *The Fine Line: Drawing with Silver in America*. (West Palm Beach: Norton Gallery & School of Art, 1985.) 10.

and sand 3 coats of a zinc white gouache and Chinese white watercolor mixture. The Chinese white watercolor creates a soft tone of white that creates a medium contrast in conjunction with the silverpoint medium. This tone allows the drawing to have an atmospheric quality and gives and implies an ambiguous space in which the objects exist. After I have completed the drawings I then measure each specifically and create a wooden panel smaller than the actual size of the paper. When each panel is complete and sanded with a fine grit paper I apply and sand 3 to 4 coats of thin gesso to the surface while allowing the gesso to drip down the sides of each panel. After the gesso has dried I create a mixture of acrylic medium and water and apply it to both the panel surface and the back of the drawing. Before the medium dries, I place the drawing face up on the panel, cover it with newsprint or paper equivalent, and begin adhering the drawing to the panel using a roller. I start from the center of the panel and roll out toward the surface to alleviate any bubbles that may form under the paper. I wipe off the excess medium that has been pushed to the edge of the panel and let the rest dry for at least an hour. I then turn over the panel and cut off the excess paper that extends over the sides using an X-acto knife to create a clean edge. The finished pieces have clean straight edges and the white in the space of the drawing seems to encapsulate the natural wood of the sides of the panels.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SILVERPOINT AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

While creating the *lure* series of silverpoints, I began to experiment with adding color to my work. Initially, I painted watercolors onto the surface of two of my silverpoints, filling in some of the shapes I had drawn as if I were coloring a comic book illustration. I became unsatisfied with this implementation of color and chose to search for an alternative. During this time my interest in creating a larger silverpoint arose. I stretched a large canvas and used only gesso as my ground. I began drawing using the same process I had with my silverpoints on paper. The mixed media piece I created is titled *Motorized Urena Lobata Emanation* (figure 9). My intention was to create a balance between two realities, while they both inhabit the same space and remain unique to themselves. In *Motorized Urena Lobata Emanation* the realities intended to be visually expressed were those of man's fragmentation of the environment and the non-utopian space that nature and man co-exist in. I've fractured the space that my fluid drawings belong to with geometric shapes that create these two realities. I am inspired by the physical forms of industrial equipment and then found an interesting ventilation system that was originally coated with blue paint, but had faded and rusted over time. Using the piece of equipment as visual source material, I attempted to capture its essence in *Motorized Urena Lobata Emanation* by abstracting its form into straight-edged geometric shapes onto the canvas. I mixed a blue using white, phthalocyanine blue, cobalt blue, and ultramarine blue until I achieved a hue that was ideal in representing the original blue of the equipment. The positive and negative shapes that this ventilation system created reminded me of some of the biomorphic elements in my own drawings, so I also used the equipment as inspiration for the parts of the silverpoint drawing in this work. As with the *lure* series, the silverpoint drawing on this canvas represents

the physical manifestations of my thought process, including images born from reactions to earlier marks. Some of the biomorphic globular forms reference human and animal mutations, suggesting toxic pollution and its affect on life.

HISTORIC INFLUENCES

Michelangelo Caravaggio

Judith Beheading Holofernes. Caravaggio was a Baroque artist who painted dramatic scenes using chiaroscuro, referred to then as *tenebrismo*, which was a painting technique that encapsulated the figure in darkness to reveal emotional tension through the contrast of light on their figure. He would also employ strong diagonals in his work to emphasize the narrative.

Max Ernst

The Elephant Celebes. Ernst's use of a surreal atmosphere in this painting coupled with the large subject matter and collage of known objects to create others. Ernst on collage: "[It is] the systematic exploitation of the coincidental or artificially provoked encounter of two or more unrelated realities on an apparently inappropriate plane and the spark of poetry created by the proximity of these realities."⁹

Hans Bellmer

Historia del Ojo. Bellmer was an excellent draughtsman and an eccentric surrealist that drew and sculpted perverse humanoids and objects that were explicit pubescent versions of his sexual desires and thoughts.

Andre Masson

Masson once stated, "I begin without an image or plan in mind, but just draw or paint rapidly according to my impulses. Gradually, in the marks I make, I see suggestions of figures or objects. I encourage these to emerge, trying to bring out their implications even as I now consciously try to give order to the composition."¹⁰ As he created his works, images from his

⁹ Ingo F. Walther. *Masterpieces of Western Art: A History of Art in 900 Individual Studies from the Gothic to the Present Day*. (Köln; New York: Taschen, 2002.) 608.

¹⁰ Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism*. (Woodbury: Barron's Educational Series, Inc, 1978.) 37

mind, including flora, fauna, and sexual imagery, began to form in his linear marks. He then illustrated them, but not to the extent that I render the images in my work. His attention to the metamorphosis of his drawings, from line to object, is a quality I find in my own process of creation.

CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

Jeff Soto

The Corruption of Mankind. Soto uses washes of paint on a white surface to draw ambiguousness to the image of an environment on which he then renders cartoons, symbols, abstract elements, and known objects in acrylic and spray paint. In this particular work he seems to reveal the downfall of America's economy through the image of a seemingly run-down outlet store.

Alex Pardee

Awful/Homesick. Pardee, like Soto, employs washes of paint on his painting surface. He uses an illustrative style of mark making to render deformed humanoids and monsters, some of which are formed out of the odd shapes the washes reveal. Pardee's childhood memories of his father's nutcracker collection also influence the shape and static expression on some of his humanoid creatures.

Douglas Bourgeois

American Address. In this painting, Bourgeois depicts Irma Thomas in an allegorical narrative about the experience of Hurricane Katrina. His use of regional culture and icons influence my work mainly because we are from the same region of Louisiana and have interests in including the Louisiana landscape in our vocabulary of artwork. Bourgeois' work differs from mine in that he creates rich image-dense narrative oil paintings whereas I draw surreal biomorphic images that seemingly exist in a space with no gravity. While our style differs, we both consider our experiences growing up in the same region when creating our artwork. The unique way in which Bourgeois paints, paying close attention to detail with a single haired brush, gives me inspiration to infuse such an anal process into my own work.

Inka Essenhigh

Volcanic Ash. Essenhigh's surreal paintings "mimic the future."¹¹ She paints beautiful flat images sprawling with amorphous forms that bare some resemblance to popular culture icons, such as Ninja Turtles, and horses. She is skilled in automatic drawing, which further helps in her development of these flowing organic ambiguous narratives. Regarding her work, she says, "the general movement in any of my compositions is a physical representation of my own energy."¹²

Julie Mehretu

Dispersion and Black City. Mehretu creates abstract urban landscapes and narratives that embody the energy of the location and people she is referencing by layering expressive marks and architectural elements using ink with shapes of flat acrylic paint on the surface of her canvases. She activates the space using these elements to create large, almost cosmic, bursts of life, derived from her own experiences living in various habitats.¹³

¹¹ Barry Schwabsky, *Vitamin P*. London: (Phaidon Press Limited, 2007.) 106.

¹² Ibid. 106.

¹³ Ibid. 214.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed the ideas behind my artwork, their execution, and aim. My work presents biomorphic images, set in a specific fantastic reality void of gravity, which stands as a visual representation of a seemingly harmonious space, opposite the reality of living on earth. Moreover, my work embodies my thoughts as it relates to my exposure to living in the southern region of Louisiana, presenting them in a visual vocabulary. I draw upon my care for our natural environment as well as my personal experiences and interests in life as my source materials. Though my silverpoint drawings and painting omit recognizable symbols or objects, making the work more universal and open to interpretation, each body of work that I have created during my time in graduate school relates to one another, considering their underlying themes address the disruption of our environment in conjunction with displaying images of mutated biological forms.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1: “Ancêtre” acrylic, watercolor, illustration marker, colored pencil, ink, crayon, spit, and paper on wood panel. 36" x 36" 2009.



Figure 2: "Sporadic Rapture, Quillwort" acrylic, watercolor, illustration marker, colored pencil, ink, crayon, spit, and paper on wood panel. 48" x 35" 2009.



Figure 3: "Le Voile du Marais" acrylic, watercolor, illustration marker, colored pencil, ink, crayon, spit, and paper on wood panel. 36" x 26.5" 2009.



Figure 4: "The Sorrow of Derrickzistance" oil and acrylic on canvas. 4' x 5' x 1.5". 2009.



Figure 5: “lure” series in BOSS LEVEL MECHASAURUS at the UNO St. Claude Gallery on January 8th, 2011.



Figure 6: "lure 1.00 (Carcinojira en Orbital Constance)" silverpoint on paper on panel. 29 5/8" x 21 11/16" x 1 5/8". 2010



Figure 7: "lure 2.00 (Hot-Wired Larval Troubleshooting)" silverpoint on paper on panel. 29 5/8" x 21 11/16" x 1 5/8". 2010



Figure 8: "lure .01 (The Spawning of Dangleborgs)" silverpoint on paper on panel. 7 7/8" x 6 13/16" x 1 11/16". 2010

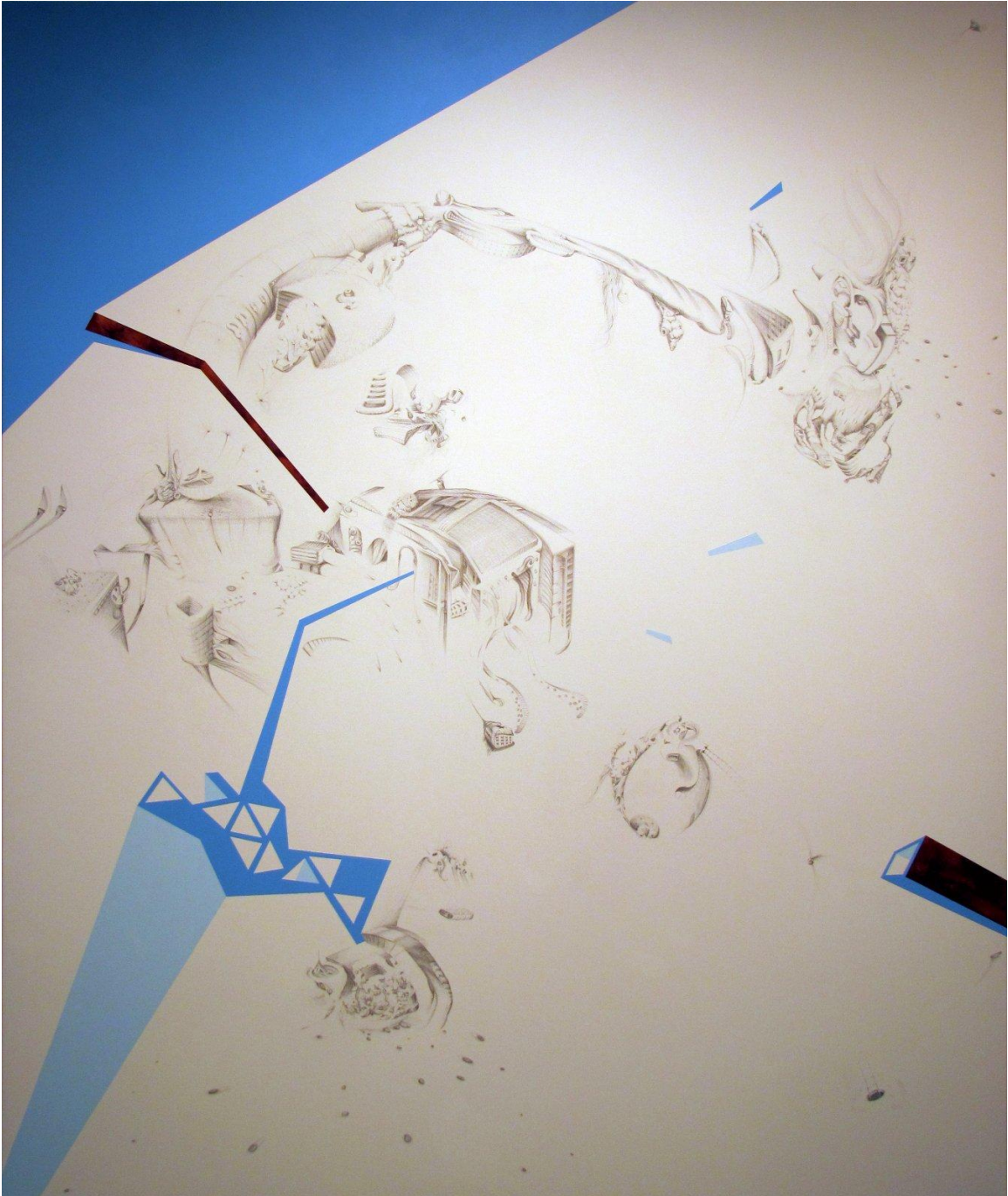


Figure 9: "Motorized Urena Lobata Emanation" acrylic and silverpoint on canvas. 5' x 4' x 1.5".
2010

VITA

Jonathan Mayers was born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Mr. Mayers attended Louisiana State University as a computer science major before changing his course of study and earning his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Studio Art in 2007. He is engaged to Miss Austyn-Marie Hollowell and currently resides in the Carrollton neighborhood of Uptown, New Orleans, Louisiana.