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## Maturation of Practices

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Maturation of Practices

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

Wendell Brunious

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## ABSTRACT

The disparate concepts of Pop Art and abstract painting heavily influence the scope of my work. Finding a link between these two concepts has been the focal point of my studio practices. The apex of my process is the focus on commercial imagery as abstract form. The merging of these two concepts presents a complex composition of balance, color and information.

This thesis explores the various concepts as well as influences that have propelled the evolution of my work. It chronicles the steps I have taken in my quest to articulate my conceptual ideas. By describing the works and defining their characteristics, this analysis gives further insight to my perception as well as process.

**Keywords:** Pop art, nostalgia, commercial imagery, process, mundane, pop culture, fragments

## INTRODUCTION

My artwork consists of imagery fragmented to become abstract form. I use bits and pieces of logos, patterns, comic art and graffiti compiled on the surface to give only hints of reference, which contribute fractions of dialogue. This concept has become a symbol for how information is perceived in the present day. The fast paced, consumer-driven tone of today's society has forced us to process information in rapid form. The Internet has provided an infinite spectrum of resources along with opinions that overload us with information. My work comments on how vast amounts of information compete for our attention. The images compiled on the surface contend for the interest of the viewer. In many ways, this is how I myself have perceived information my whole life.

The advancements in technology have made it easier to compile and edit this information using computer programs. Digital works have become the dominant avenue for expressing this kind of imagery. I chose the more traditional methods of painting and screen-printing to project my images to the viewer. Through effort and skill, these methods have a way of making artworks more substantial. Creating my artworks through these means has provided a way to relate the personal importance of this imagery that has contributed to my existence.

Commercial imagery and other sources from popular culture have played an important role throughout my life. From a very young age, they became learning tools through which I viewed and experienced the world. It has provided entertainment as well as inspiration, which were key factors of my youth. As an adult, I look upon this imagery with nostalgia. Using images from my youth along with more relevant ones allows me to merge different concepts and express creativity through these various sources.

The opportunity of graduate school has allowed me through studio practices to explore what these images mean to me. How I have chosen to project them to an audience in a fine art setting has been an evolutionary process. Education in Art History has afforded me the perception of how this process fits into the concept of modern art. It has provided for me a rich history of past figures that have contemplated and executed the same processes and concepts as myself. Aside from the main influences apparent in my work, a number of new characters have come to my attention. With having to write about my work, influences such as Dave Hickey has been essential. His use of nostalgic references to relay modern issues has provided a similar projection of concept related to my work.



## BACKGROUND AND INSPIRATIONS

My work is grounded in imagery associated with popular culture. Images found in this field speak directly to the mundane. Consumer products and other commercial images are not considered extraordinary. They are not looked upon with artistic merit given their purpose. Images associated with pop culture and commercial methods define the banality of life. They are passed over and thrown away, but rarely given thought to the splendor of their design. They have the ability to be held invaluable as far as worth but channel a language of nostalgia, which in some cases can be priceless. We relate the familiar to certain aspects of our lives. This imagery is related to time. In terms of nostalgia, we use it to define memories or to identify an era. A Chrysler logo will always remind me of my uncle's 1984 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. that he washed every Saturday morning. In a more modern context, we use these objects to define ourselves. Icons can possess a hierarchy, which measures status. Through personal importance, this imagery is used to express individuality. My art promotes how this imagery relates to our personal substance.

The need to incorporate this form of imagery is vital to my art making. Because I am a product of an era in which individuality is influenced by consumer products and commercial status, the presence of commercial imagery is essential. In order to project this part of myself, I must incorporate the materialistic substances that make up the superficial DNA (genetic code) of my existence. I have come to realize that I am a reflection of that which I see. However, unlike actual DNA, I have the ability to choose the imagery that makes up my genetic existence. The essence of my work involves images that have inspired me or have caught my interest based on design or appearance.

I have always associated myself with pop culture. I did not have much guidance or

support growing up. My biological father walked out on my mother, sister and I when I was 2 months old to start an entirely new family. My mother remarried and immediately had other children. As she tried to spread her attention amongst us, my stepfather immersed himself completely into fathering his biological children. This left me with no significant influence. The only guidance that I received was in the form of information received from watching television and reading magazines. Deciphering the lessons learned from TV shows and movies provided the moral fiber of my childhood. The advertisements from magazine ads and commercials projected the importance of material wealth within consumer culture. Listening to popular music, particularly urban genres provided the demeanor necessary for the environment in which I grew up. These sources became my main influences. I learned about life through these medias. I applied the teachings that I found beneficial and remembered the aspects that were inspirational.

Having a birth defect, I relied on information found in popular culture as a way of relating to people. Born with a cleft lip and palate, I immediately stood out from all of the other kids in school. Having such a noticeable defect made kids look, act and speak differently to and around me. As the kids in my classes throughout my education made fun and teased me, I did not have anyone to turn to for guidance on how to deal with it. I relied on pop culture references and commercial imagery as a way of relating to others. *Example:* If I had the newest sneakers, kids would pay attention to my shoes rather than my facial defect. I used these consumer sources to camouflage my setback in hopes of blurring perceptions. Through this method, I relied on consumer products as a way of filling the metaphorical holes of my youth. As an adult, I incorporate these forms of imagery as nostalgic reference and how commercial images relate to personal importance.

My background as a graphic designer has allowed me to explore how these images are created. By understanding the methods of how these icons are fabricated, I can dissect the visual importance of the design. This allows me to pull inspiration from many different sources. Diverse words, fonts, images and gestures express creativity. Finding the extraordinary in banality propels the everyday into inspirational. The interplay of these aspects has become the focal point of my work.

Conceptually my work shares characteristics with abstract painting. With painting only fragments of the imagery, the content is composed of unusual shapes that juxtapose one another. The sections giving off hints of image, dialogue or information contrast each other, which contributes to the whole mosaic of the piece. This intent is the focal point of my work. Composing arbitrary sections of color, content or both allows for a design by chance context apparent in the abstractions of Ellsworth Kelly and Gerhard Richter. The use of nonfigurative compositions allows for a moderate interpretation. The goals are to evoke emotion through the relations of color and shape as well as information. I utilize this aspect within commercial imagery to give a more personal reading of the information.

In my graduate years, I have conceptually considered how to merge different concepts into a viable process for making artworks that will extend beyond the educational platform. My studio practices over the past three years have been spent developing these concepts and creating works that communicate the visual inspirations that have influenced me as an artist. Combining different processes of painting, screen-printing and drawing, my work has undergone many changes. From the clutter of imagery to the absence of processes and back again, I have tussled with many inspirational concepts and practices, which illustrates my evolution as an artist.

## HALF CLOSED

The recontextualization of an iconic image was the focus for the compositions of *Flyboy 1,2,3* (figure1). Painted on MDF board, each panel contains different color variations of the same image. The composition was taken from the iconic image of Bob's Big Boy, a popular image from the 1930's. I wanted to give this retro character a modern context but still hold the nostalgic features this image is known for. Looking at the restaurant logo, this piece of iconography consists of a short, stout fellow with finely quaffed, jet-black hair that sits atop of his head like a sculpture. His pie-shaped eyes are bright with enthusiasm as his pupils gaze to the side. The smirk on his face complements his naïve expression as if to convey the innocence of an average joe wishing to partake in the event of dining out. Commercial characters were commonly rendered in this fashion during this era.

My concept regarding this figure was to maintain the nostalgic features of the image but retract the gullible sense of innocence this character has become associated. With his eyes half shut, his gaze transforms into a much more sinister content to suggest that he does not possess the same values that he once stood for. As his stare continues throughout the pieces, the thought that he is looking at something off of the picture plane sparks the curiosity of the viewer. The border that surrounds the composition renders a portrait of the character. Absent from the composition is the character's ridiculous grin, which is cropped off to focus on his eyes.

Using music lyrics from one of my favorite artists, Jay-Z, I decided to incorporate tidbits of his thoughts into the composition. "One of these buyers got eyes like a Korean/ It's difficult to read 'em/The window to his soul are half closed" was a lyric that stuck out to me. This meant that because his eyes are half shut, you couldn't read what he is thinking.

This is the attitude that I wanted to display with the Big Boy. Portraying him with his eyes half closed would give the same ambiguous demeanor as mentioned in the song. The purpose of his stare to the viewer is that you do not know what he is thinking or by that token, what he is capable of.

The three parts in his hairline along with the two slashes in his eyebrow gives a notion of a more contemporary look. Back in the late 80's and early 90's, boys would cut parts into their hairlines and eyebrows as a fashion statement. The significance of this display in urban culture was a symbol of rebellion. Youths wore these fashion accents to express themselves and to signify creative freedom. Being part of this era, I too have asked the barber to cut lines in my hair a time or two. The presence of this trend on the figure blends the vintage with the contemporary in the context of putting a spin on such an iconic figure.

The color variations between these images are their only differences. This isn't of importance conceptually, but it does signify the next part of my process. Taking sample colors from nostalgic sources (vintage cans, posters and an old Sears & Roebuck catalogue), I was able to appropriate the color theme for these compositions. I wanted them to have a vintage color field that would draw the nostalgic context out of the figure. Rather than mixing my own paint, I went to hardware stores and picked out color swatches that suited my preference. I then had sample colors mixed to paint the figures. Picking house paint over traditional acrylics was a conscious effort to endorse commercial satires that were parallel of the figure himself.

The artworks of Andy Warhol influence the making of these works. Warhol used repetition of iconic figures to emphasize redundancy. Repetition plays an important role

within this piece. Other than color, the three panels show no variations between them. Repetition highlights the banal. Showing multiples of the same subject matter extracts any form of originality from the image. Susan Sontag sums up the context of repetition in contemporary art. “Redundancy is the principal affliction of modern life.”<sup>1</sup> Like Warhol, my process for creating these pieces involves a continuous method of reproduction. I used stencils for each part of the composition to maintain an easily repeatable process for each work. This method would remain a constant factor throughout my art making.



Figure 1: *Flyboy 1,2,3*, 2011, House paint on MDF Board.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation in Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 3.

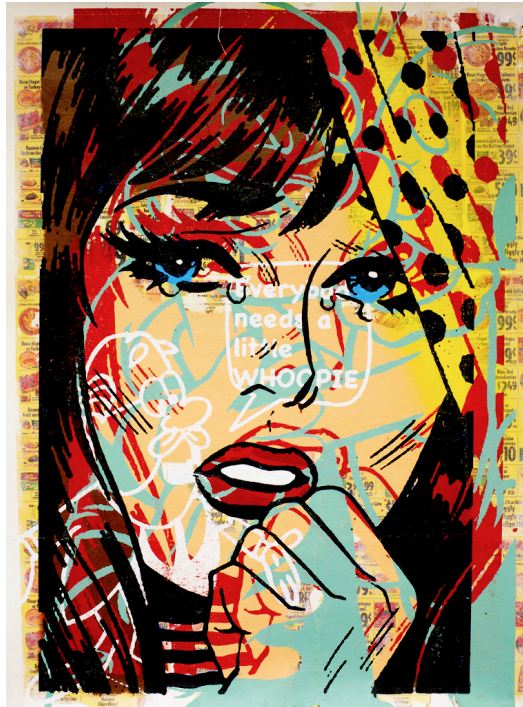
## FIGHTING FOR SURFACE

I am not ashamed to say that women fascinate me. As I became influenced by pop culture, I started to relate women with the sexual undertones portrayed. Growing up with my birth defect, I did not have much luck with girls. I always shied away from them due to insecurities with my appearance. Sometimes I felt that just getting a girl to converse with me was an accomplishment in itself. As I hit puberty, girls became more a focus of my attention but seemed even further a possibility. This led to sexual frustration and an objectified view of women due to pop culture references. I became infatuated with what I thought I would never have.

I wanted to explore this context of women in pop culture for the next series of my artwork. Using imagery of female personalities, I decided they would be the focal point of these works. As my conceptual ideas began to further, I started to incorporate different methods into my works. I did not want to just stay within the realm of painting. Since I focused on screen-printing as an undergrad, I wanted to incorporate this method into the pieces. The context for this stage of my process was to focus on vintage comic book figures from the 1960's to produce the content.

The first piece, *Whoopie* (figure2) consists of an obstructed image of cartoon characters Popeye and Olive Oil, a cartoon image of a humorous doctor, and the key image of a female character from a *True Romance* comic book. Piggly Wiggly shopping ads serve as the background for this piece. All but the background is screen-printed and painted. The image of the woman with tears forming in her eyes gives ambiguous emotional content that was apparent in romance comics in the 1960s. The emotions of the women in the comics are dictated by their facial expressions. The different features of the female are roughly

painted with parts of the background appearing through her image. A duplicate image is printed offset in red to disrupt the consistency and continue the motif of redundancy. The illustration of the doctor gives literal dialogue to the piece suggesting that the cure for the female's troubles is for her to get laid. This piece reflects the sexual undertones of the female image in popular culture comics.



**Figure 2: *Whoopie*, 2012, Mixed media on canvas.**

The second work, entitled *Green* (figure 3) pictures another *True Romance* comic book female. Adorned with jewels, blonde hair and vibrant make-up, this woman reflects the same expression of distraught present in the previous figure. The other characters, a bellboy and a cartoon donkey holding a bag of money, fight to console her. Representation of Euro currency serves as the background for this piece. Her skin tone is casually painted to allow the background again to come through. The content insinuates that she is a gold digger that cannot be consoled because her satisfaction will never be filled. As the bellboy



tends to her needs and the donkey offers her money, her expression conveys that she still needs more. This piece relates materialistic stereotypes suggested of women in pop culture.



Figure 3: *Green, 2012, Mixed media on canvas.*

Inspiration for these two images -both content and process- came from a variety of influences. Along with the obvious connotations of appropriation from Warhol and Lichtenstein, another artist was heavily inspirational. Greg Gossel, a mixed media artist from Minnesota, uses various images from pop culture to create a juxtaposition of surface tension between the figures. His use of pop imagery was an inspiration for me because it was relatable as subject matter. I was familiar with the characters he used and wanted to emulate the same form of surface tension between the images. The purpose of the assorted characters in these works is to present a particular theme within each piece rather than just a collage of figures.

*Buried Alive* (figure 4) was a different take on the imagery fighting for the surface. Three key images repeated throughout the composition serve as focal points for this piece. I chose images of Whitney Houston, Kim Kardashian and a no name model for the content of this work. I started out by laying primed canvas on the worktable. I painted a background color and proceeded to print my first image. After I filled the surface with the image, I taped over the whole canvas. I cut out patterns with an X-acto knife that looked like paper tears and began to paint the surface another color. From there I screened the second image and then repeated the process of taping and cutting. I painted in a third layer of color and screened my final image.

When I finished this part of the piece, the layers of the three women seemed as if they were tearing in and out of each other. With contrasting colors separating the images, all three layers were distinguishable from each other. The multiple rips make it difficult to configure which image was painted first. This was to be the core of the painting. The subject matter related to this work was focused on the importance of fame. Intrigued by popular culture, fame is the basis of significance. These women represent the three levels of recognition. Whitney Houston, a multi talented singer with crowning achievements, is pictured from the cover of her first album that launched her to stardom. Kim Kardashian, a young woman who by today's standard of celebrity status is only famous for being famous and is pictured with a ditsy grin on her face. With no apparent talent or attributes, her good looks are her only contribution to popular culture. The last image was the centerfold of a model found in a magazine. No name recognition or credit, just the objectiveness of her figure is relevant. She represents the endless and nameless number of beauties waiting for their 15 minutes of fame. While the Warhol concept of the 15 minutes applies to both sexes,

women are the more objectified when applying this term. I think of all of the dating shows in which women compete for a chance at love or shall I say their 15 minutes.

The fight for surface between these three figures conceptually signifies the struggle for attention that people in pop culture compete for. The everlasting talent, the flash in the pan celebrity and the token beauty all come through the surface in this piece and battle to command our attention. Repetition of the figures is an essential part of this work. The constant fight for attention applies to all three stages of fame. The repetition of the figures represents their continuous efforts to remain relevant in all stages.

Three *True Romance* comic book characters are painted on top of these figures to contrast with the background. On the left, a blonde figure cries over a broken heart. In the middle, a toxic domestic couple has an argument. And on the right is an image of teenage love. The old fashioned female comics juxtapose the more contemporary and relevant objectification of female roles in pop culture.



Figure 4: *Buried Alive*, 2012, Acrylic, screen print and house paint on canvas.

These works undoubtedly channel the inspiration of Lichtenstein. The characters described are appropriated in the same manner and have the same context. Like Lichtenstein my paintings at this time “illustrate the stereotypical emotions of the depicted females to challenge traditional behaviors.”<sup>2</sup> I was using these figures to illustrate the outdated issues against the more relevant regarding the objectification of women in popular culture. Though in hindsight my ideas on this topic seem eloquent, issues regarding context were challenged which forced me to diverge my content as well as thought process dramatically for the next phase of my practices.

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<sup>2</sup> Christin Mamiya, *The Mass Media in an Age of Publicity in Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market* (Austin: Goetzmann, 1992), 89.

## ABSTRACTING CONTENT

I began the series *Untitled (Abstracts I, II, III)* (figure 5) with a different concept than the previous works. After dealing so much with figurative imagery and the unpredictable and haphazard process of screen-printing, I wanted to utilize traditional painting methods as a focus for my studio practices. Not only that, but conversations regarding the content of my previous works did not go according to plan. The use of comic imagery that preceded my time brought about issues that I was not ready to talk about. The works consisting of vintage characters that were no longer relevant paled in comparison to the more contemporary figures. Exhausted with subject matter and printing processes, I wanted to take a step back from this dialogue to pursue abstract forms of inspiration. Along with making and stretching canvases myself, I wanted to create a system of painting that would offer a more organized and calculated execution. Shying away totally from the screen-printing methods that I had become accustomed to, I wanted to completely rely on painting to make these works.

Consisting of abstracted fragments of cartoon characters, this series highlights the same use of popular imagery that relates to certain nostalgic aspects of modern thinking. Unlike previous works, these pieces follow the traditional aspects of painting. Using only acrylic paints on stretched canvas, the compositions are based on animation presented as abstract shapes. The shapes are filled with flat color, which relate to its original sources. A sense of depth is perceived by the color variations that contour certain parts of these figures. This method is similar to the illusion presented in animation by using a slight tonal difference to suggest light and shadow to perceive depth.

Along with flattened parts that interact with the shapes, the figures are compiled to fit the vertical orientation of the canvases. The shapes move about each other and cast shadows to suggest space. Taping the surface and cutting the contours with an X-acto knife achieved the hard edges of the shapes. The first painting's most identifiable image is located in the lower right corner. The orange shape resembles a tongue that sits in the light blue area. The tonal difference in the blue alludes to a shadow cast in the inside of a mouth. The second piece contains a bright red hot dog shape. This is actually the hat of Disney's Goofy, which is presented as an abstraction. The last piece has the most imagery. The neon yellow shape of a cartoon hand opens as a lavender streak runs through it. The green in the lower left area is reminiscent of Dr. Seuss' Grinch character, while the upper green shape is a piece from the hat of Dopey from *Snow White*. The darkness of the background in the first two paintings signified for me the void of inspiration that I was experiencing at the time. The objects alive with color filling this void and energizing the space were my intensions.

I composed these pieces by tracing on vellum paper parts of cartoon characters from older and newer animation. When I was satisfied with the layout of the composition, I would draw a bounding box that would serve as the dimensions of the canvas. From there I would transfer the image onto transparent paper and project it onto the canvas. Drawing the composition on the canvas allowed me to keep the drawing proportions accurate. Once the image was present on the canvas, sections were then taped off and painted to achieve the hard-edged appearance of the original imagery. Afterwards, I would assign the different sections a color from my color palette. Using a numerical system, I assigned random numbers to the different paint colors.

The number system served as a method of organizing my palette. Documenting how a particular color was mixed and writing it down allowed for me an effective way of easily reproducing the color. I would write in the number on the composition that would fill the individual shape. The tonal variation (or shadow) of that color was also mixed and documented using the same number followed by the letter "S" which meant "shadow." Sometimes I worked randomly and other times I really focused on the color choices. Spontaneous decisions were kept to a minimum. Absent from the cartoon influence is the use of the black lines to distinguish the shapes. Animators use black strokes to easily separate foreground from background and relay the figurative illusion to the audience. I chose not to use this method in my paintings to give a more abstract quality to the shapes.

The inspiration of strictly animated content stemmed from the moral decline of one of my main influences. The content of television, which I had come to rely on for many years, did not seem interesting to me anymore. With the influx of numerous reality shows and ridiculous sitcoms, I found it very hard to relate to the new format of television. The implied "real lives" of no name people made famous overnight did not suit the nostalgic outlooks that television provided me. Using this media as a source of inspiration all of my life, I found myself for the first time uninspired by what it had to offer.

I felt that this was no longer a suitable means of inspiration for me, which was really difficult to take. Its only redeeming quality for me was animated shows. I found myself only watching cartoons (new and old) for means of entertainment, nostalgia and relativity. I watched cartoons such as *Family Guy*, *American Dad* and *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* to serve as an escape from the absurd plots of reality shows that polluted the airwaves. I watched

older *Looney Tunes* cartoons and animated movies for nostalgic reference. I saw these cartoons as an inspiration and content in my paintings.



**Figure 5: *(Untitled) Abstracts I, II, III, 2012, Acrylic on canvas.***

The studio practices of Brian Donnelly, aka KAWS, along with painter Erik Parker were the main artistic influences during this time. Both artists use a vibrant color palette to compose their artworks. Donnelly, a former background artist for Nickelodeon cartoons, appropriates certain characters from his youth and his background artist days as the focal imagery for his paintings. He extracts certain elements from characters such as Spongebob Squarepants and arranges abstract compositions. He includes abstract shapes that appear to have multiple dimensions to give a sense of depth. He uses solid color backgrounds to



bring his objects to the foreground. His energetic color combinations grab his audiences' attention.

Erik Parker creates vibrant and lush still lifes using bright colors. Both artists use a system for the color paints that are used. Erik Parker documents the colors that he mixes and names them according to his own preference. KAWS, likewise, uses a numbering system to categorize his color palette. These numbers relate to tonal values within the different colors similar to a chroma color palette. I decided to adopt a similar process for my paints.

Aspiring to emulate these artists, I wanted my process to be as organized as theirs were. This part of my method was most beneficial as a way of working strictly within a given space. Using the paintings as the end result, the perfecting of this assembly line method of art making was the main focus of my practices during this time. This was in preparation for after graduate school when I would not be able to rely on the facilities of the university to create my artworks. Only relying on the resources within my studio space to make the pieces was the focal point to effectively produce artworks.

Aside from the inspirations of these artists, the concept of becoming an art machine was vital to my process. Developing a system for making artworks allowed me to produce these works with little or no conceptual efforts. Though my intention for utilizing the source material has conceptual thought, the end result of this series is the culmination of the process. This process is directly related to the conceptual ideas of Sol Lewitt. Although my practices differ from his *Drawing Series*, the idea of mapping out the idea and going through detailed steps was key for my works as well. Like Lewitt, my decisions are made

beforehand so that the execution is a “perfunctory affair.”<sup>3</sup> Altered from Lewitt’s views, my intentions were not to be free from my skills as a craftsman. My ability as an artist to compose whimsical compositions of shape and color that would draw the viewer in was a priority. After evaluating the outcome of this method, the compositions of the paintings seemed one dimensional and ineffective. The flatness of the backgrounds did not activate the abstract forms nor did the interaction of the shapes invigorate the sense of depth that I hoped for. Even though the visual aspects of this period were unsuccessful, there were factors that were taken from this and carried over into the next stage of my studio practices.

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<sup>3</sup> Sol Lewitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” *Artforum*, June 1967, 79.

## THE GRID

“While many artists *use* digital technology, how many really confront the question of what it means to think, see, and filter affect through digital? How many *thematize* this, or reflect deeply on how we experience, and are altered by, the digitization of our existence?”<sup>4</sup>

-Claire Bishop

The series that would amount to the body of work that I would show for my thesis exhibition can be seen as a response to the digital existence that has become the norm in advanced technological society. Information becomes abundantly condensed. The substance of knowledge has been replaced by an overload of imagery. This relates to a society that values visual satisfaction over consistent comprehension. Information in this capacity can accumulate rather quickly.

I began production on this body of work during the summer before my final year. I wanted to create pieces so overloaded with imagery and information that they would become visually overwhelming. Using my interests and knowledge of graphic design, I wanted to include text in abstract form to contribute to the works. I started using wood panels as my surface rather than stretched canvas because it would offer more support for the different mediums that would be used. Traditional painter methods would give way to diverse forms of mark makings. These methods would serve as the visuals for these works. The return to figurative imagery along with screen-printing methods would proceed during this sequence. The screening practice would acquire a more abstract content than previous methods. Using the basic element of digital existence, the pixel would serve as the platform

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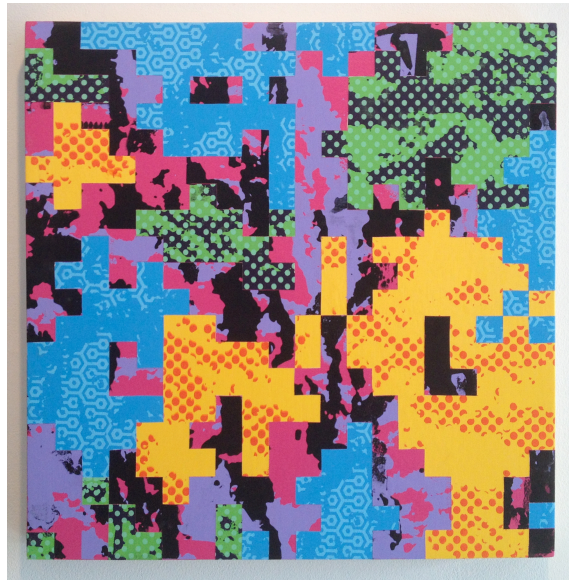
<sup>4</sup> Claire Bishop, “Digital Divide: Claire Bishop on Contemporary Art and New Media,” *Artforum*, September 2012, 436.

for this series. The use of a grid format would become vital. Most of the pieces in this series follow the square format emphasizing pixelation.

After priming the surface of the panel, I drew a grid over it. Consisting of square inches, the pixelation format of the painting is its most recognizable features. This began from the influence of digital camouflage patterns. I was intrigued with the notion of digital camouflage as the universal pattern of the military. While previous patterns related to different terrains of war, digital pattern does not relate to a particular environment. I used the patterns of pixelated camouflage and incorporated other patterns within the different layers. Previous methods of taping and cutting the surface and with an X-Acto knife were applied. The hard-edged separation of color throughout the layers is achieved using this method. With the influence of Warhol and his ideas for his camouflage paintings, I too wanted to do something that was figurative but had an abstract quality.

For *New Dawn* (figure 6) I cut out the sequence of patterns from the taped surface and filled them in with a background color. Following the four-color scheme of camouflage, I did the same process for all four layers. After color was added, I screen-printed different images. Each layer consists of different patterns screened onto the background. Starting with the lightest color, I painted a yellow background. With the rest of the surface protected, I screen-printed a layer of orange broken Ben-day dots. After removing that layer of adhesive and re-taping the surface, a layer of light green was painted with deep purple cloud shapes screened into the pattern. On top of the purple I printed a layer of smaller green dots. A cyan blue with a lighter blue honeycomb pattern make up the third layer. Magenta with a series of violet and black clouds going vertical and horizontal occupy the last layer.

Each layer of this painting is intended to clash with the other. Broken dot patterns meet more consistent dots. The dots, which represent process, are contrasted by more organic-like patterns. The colors of the organic patterns oppose each other. The main color scheme resembles the CMYK color process that makes up digital color printing.



**Figure 6: *New Dawn*, 2013, Acrylic and screen-print on panel**

Pixelated camouflage does not serve the same utilitarian purpose as traditional patterns. While other designs serve as a strategy for hiding, digital camouflage cannot execute this task. The pixilation does not blend in with a natural environment. It deems itself irrelevant in the context of its purpose. The appearance becomes a symbol for how war is fought in the present. The pixelated patterns pertain to the digital existence that has evolved through modern technologies. This irrelevancy highlights the context of the painting. The already useless patterns becomes more extraneous when filled with additional designs. Just like Warhol, I used gaudy colors that conflict with the traditional camouflage motifs. These use of these colors nullify its purpose as a blending mechanism. I

chose the color combination of digital colors to combat any notions of the pixelation itself blending into an environment.

*A Losing Game* (figure 7) takes on a more unsystematic theme of color and imagery. Using a variety of methods and images, the concept of displaying vast amounts of information that exists on the same surface level is the focus of this piece. Continuing with the grid format, I decided to incorporate images as well as random mark makings using a variety of different color schemes. Using an unsystematic approach to the pixelated concept, I employed the same process of taping off the surface and cutting the patterns of the grid. Instead of following the idea of pixelated camouflage patterns evident in *New Dawn*, I opted for simply cutting my own chance shapes and filling them with whatever imagery or painting marks that came to mind.

My process began with first cutting a number of infinite patterns that the grid format afforded me. After I finished cutting the first layer, I supplied distinctive colors that would evenly (in some cases) fill the spaces. After the paints were applied, I responded to each set of colors with disparate sources of imagery. A number of distinctive images were used to fill in the painted spaces. Some of the images are screen-printed, while others were projected onto the panel and hand-painted. As the randomness of the shapes cut in and out, the information becomes scattered and contrasting on the surface. Source material that is included in this piece comes from various forms of interest and inspiration.

I used a variety of images that I have accumulated through the years to complete this piece. Some of the more recognizable images include *Black Cat*, a comic book heroine from the 1960's, old burlesque posters that include the names of unusual headliners, the logo of fashion designer Tom Ford, and even Michael Jackson's signature from the cover of

his *Thriller* album. Halftone patterns, a labyrinth maze and broken Ben-day dots from the previous work were screen-printed along with other images.



**Figure 7: *A Losing Game*, 2013, Acrylic, screen-print and spray paint on panel**

These images have notions of nostalgia, modernism and design that have been important to my artistic practice. Also included with these images are abstracted shapes that are part of a larger picture but become unrecognizable as the shapes cut in and out of each other. Ellsworth Kelly's abstract principles of representation inspired these sections. Barbara Rose's description of isolation of things seen to achieve rational order give weight to my editing process. "This order at odds with the churning of an undisciplined mass culture" contributes significantly to my concept.<sup>5</sup> Noticeable letters and fonts relates to my interests in graphic design layout and sign painting. To fill out other parts of the surface, I

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<sup>5</sup> Barbara Rose, *Ellsworth Kelly: Curves/ Rectangles* (New York: Rose, 1989), 3.

used graffiti markers and spray paint. These marks drip and spray to resemble street art that has been inspirational to me.

The goal of this piece was to explore the effect of being bombarded with information. Being that digital technology has changed the way we process information, I wanted to display the effect it has had on me personally. Through means of the World Wide Web, infinite information as well as inspiration in many cases is readily accessible. Having so much material to pull from, it makes it hard for me to edit content. I chose to include as much information in this piece as I could to display my personal sense of overwhelm within imagery. The pixilation is a response and a taunt to technology. The composition with all of the information bough to the surface mimics the effect that happens when a computer screen is overloaded with information. The irony of this concept was the essence of this work. The efforts of painting this imagery and not resorting to the effects of Photoshop are my way of combating the ideals of “new media”<sup>6</sup> art wave and its effects within my own practices.

The barely decipherable information presented resembles a computer screen that has malfunctioned. The pixel patterns form a glitch that brings all of the imagery to the visual surface. This responds to the way that imagery today competes for attention. With the overwhelming amounts of advertisements, the vast amount of imagery nowadays becomes homogenized with very little discernable significance. The various images that have motivated my artistic practices become mere fragments of information. This aspect allows me to edit the work as I see fit. Only painting the fragments of the image that interest me is my way of regaining control over this information. With this method, the

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<sup>6</sup> Claire Bishop, “Digital Divide: Claire Bishop on Contemporary Art and New Media,” *Artforum*, September 2012, 436.



viewer too has options. Focusing and connecting with certain areas of the painting or appreciating the whole mosaic of the work are my intentions for the audience. With this notion of interpretation, the challenge of incorporating disparate sources of inspiration becomes more coherent.

Another piece in this series is *Greedy* (figure 8). Deciding to open up the grid patterns for smaller pieces, *Greedy* contains less abstracted imagery than *A Losing Game*. The same techniques were applied but the fragments are not so condensed. The more consistent patterns allow the images to become more decipherable than the previous work. The sections consisting of text have more legibility but contain only broken narrative subject matter made by the cut-off of the patterns. Set beside other layers of screen-prints and graffiti drips, the same surplus of information and technique is present. Though it is a square panel, it is displayed at a forty-five degree angle to make a diamond shape. This allows the pixels to take on a different context and become more of a design.

The influence of Mondrian becomes debatable in this work. While the diamond shape appearance is comparable, Mondrian's compositions become cropped representations of an object in a three-dimensional space.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that the composition extends beyond the shape of the canvas. My sections do not suggest this illusion. The importance of balance in form, color and, in my case, information between the pixelated images does echo Mondrian's concepts of balance and harmony within his works.

*Less Petty* (figure 9) also possesses openness within the grid. The same use of taping and cutting shapes is approached in this piece. Different layers of hand-painted text are intertwined with layers of graffiti marks and screen-printed images. The diverse color

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<sup>7</sup> Meyer Schapiro, *Mondrian: On the Humanity of Abstract Painting* (New York: Braziller, 1995), 29.

schemes amongst the sections give the same amount of contrast as the subject matter. Unlike *Greedy*, this piece hangs in the square format. The difference in the orientation is meant to juxtapose its counterpart. These works are meant to hang opposite from one another to emphasize this contrast. I thought conceptually of the conflict between Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg. While both compositions contain the same basis of imagery and context, the slight change in orientation is enough to render them different conceptually. While Mondrian and van Doesburg's conflicts do further philosophically, the idea of conflict between two similar styles intrigued me in a humorous fashion, which extended into the displaying of these works.



Figure 8: Greedy, 2013, Acrylic and screen-print on panel. Figure 9: Less Pitty, 2013, Acrylic and screen-print on panel.

## BREAKING THE GRID

After exploring the grid as a way of separating imagery, I decided to break that format for a less strategic and more aesthetic method of dividing the surface. The geometric approach of intersecting lines replaces the grid layout in the next pieces of this series. *Top Down*, (figure 10) compiles sections of text, pattern, mark making and plain color to fill the surface. The shard glass motif of the sharp edges separates the different pieces of information and uses an alternative to the grid layout to provide surface tension. While this alternative performs the same purpose as the grid, it brings a different form of aesthetics to the composition. Fragments of the piece juxtapose each other as in previous works, while others sections intersect and interrupt one another.

Minding the diagonal shape that breaks the squared format, an invisible horizon line crosses the center. Just below this line is an example of pieces intersecting each other. In the section to the left there are squares of yellow and black diagonals. Within the black there is a continuous white line that runs through. Its momentum continues despite the interference from the yellow shards. Another example is located in the upper-right portion. Along the top edge a red drip runs down a white and violet sector. Fragments of color and design cut into this section in attempts to break its continuity but its consistency remains. A larger segment of the piece contains an abstracted view of a Louis Vuitton logo. In an attempt to overlap certain parts and give a slight illusion of depth, the logo seemingly changes hue as it crosses the barrier of the blue fragment. These efforts coincide with Greenberg's argument of *depicted* flatness found in the Cubist methods of collage.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Collage in Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Greenberg, 1961), 72

The effects of Picasso and Braque’s abilities to break the two-dimensional space through creative illusionistic techniques interests me during the making of this piece. As a means of evolving my process, the *trompe-l’oeil* idea of breaking the picture plane seemed to be the next plausible step. Aside from cutting out actual sources and pasting them onto the surface, new ways of suggesting space has become a priority within my process. It is important to me however, that my paintings are seen as paintings. The literal flatness and disconnect from material is an important aspect within my work. The synthetic representation of the objects as they interact with other images allows me to maintain control of my content. The aspects that in Greenberg’s eloquence “permit a minimal illusion of three-dimensional space” are intriguing but do not take priority over my process to render the various forms of inspiration that forwards my content.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 10: *Top Down*, 2013, Acrylic, screen-print and spray paint on panel

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<sup>9</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Collage in Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Greenberg, 1961), 72

*Shock Waves* (figure 11) is the last piece of this series. The largest of the square paintings; it contains the most assorted imagery. Do to its size, the break up of the surface has more design elements mixed in with abstract patterns. The two-inch border that outlines the perimeter also contains fragments of imagery. Dissected logos occupy the upper-left and right corner while elements of my own graffiti tag make up the lower-right corner. The left side of the painting consists of squares that are broken up into many different pieces. Screen-printed imagery, hand-painted letters and flat sections of color inhabit this area. The center is made up of larger sections that are filled with various images. Some sections are made up of imagery that relay only fractions of information. A harsh black graffiti tag vandalizes an upper-left section of flat color. Other sections include another weeping *True Romance* comic woman set atop screen-printed adult sex ads and adjacent to that is a section containing comic book text painted over a vintage stripper flyer.



Figure 11: *Shock Waves*, 2014, Acrylic, screen-print and spray paint on panel

The title of this piece arrives from an image located in the center of the artwork. A piece from a Superman comic book depicting the character's demise is screen-printed and hand-painted. The text not pictured explains that the final blow, which is pictured, was so tremendous that shockwaves could be felt. This description captures the attitude of not only this piece but of the entire series. The impact of imagery that hits all at the same time becomes tremendous. The ability to decipher this information as it is being thrown at us becomes impossible to sustain.

The corporations that try to control this consumer-based society allocate this bombardment of imagery and information to baffle our minds into submission. Though this bombardment has become inescapable, my attempts within my art have been to edit this information my own way. Paying attention to the features that interest me allows me to face this barrage on my own terms. In doing this, facets of color relationships along with form and design become the subject matter amongst the sections. Within this editing process, the banality of the imagery becomes splendor. My intent is to incorporate the brilliance that can be found when the mundane information starts to take on interesting and abstract qualities. The contours of the image begin to outweigh the formal aspects of representation.

## CONCLUSION

The works that have been described chronicle the evolution of my studio practices over the past three years. The different pieces mentioned serve as milestones in my process to articulate my ideas as an artist. The variations between them highlight the diverse methods and inspirations that have dictated their depictions. The imagery used relates the importance of nostalgia and inspiration. The abstraction of imagery within the pieces represents the splendor of design that highlights this banality.

I feel that I have evolved significantly during my graduate career. My progression as an artist represented by my studio practices has allowed me to grow more confident with my ideas. The concepts that I have envisioned and executed would not have been as eloquent had I not been afforded this opportunity. This period has given me the platform to establish myself as well as my ideas. Along with that, I am elated with my current work and look for ways to evolve these concepts as well. I will continue to explore the use of commercial imagery within my practices and look for new ways to emphasize the use of the mundane images that continue to inspire and invigorate my existence.

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## VITA

Wendell Joseph Brunious (b. 1982) was raised in New Orleans, LA. The second oldest of five, he lived with his mother, grandmother and sister for the first eight years of his life. He received his B.A. in graphic arts from the University of New Orleans in 2009. The monotony of working a dead end job as a desktop publisher at a copy center motivated him to apply to graduate school in 2011. During his last semester in graduate school his wife gave birth to their first child, a daughter named Day Elise. Wendell still lives and works in New Orleans and looks for creative ways to further his practices.