

Dream Palace

Natalie Strait

Documents submitted to the Faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art

2020

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Natalie Strait

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Artist Statement

Under the heteropatriarchal framework of American society, women are constantly perceived through their relationship/proximity to men. From birth, we are flooded with images of ourselves. Sometimes these images are visual, as in advertising, art, and media. The visual images are often generic and objectifying, existing more as extensions of cultural tropes and visual signifiers than as honest, nuanced depictions of personhood. Sometimes they exist as spoken tropes – the ideal woman, the ideal wife, the crazy ex-girlfriend, the girl next door, the spinster, the dyke, the whore, the 10. When a woman is successful, she is rumored to have “slept her way to the top,” and when she acts out, it’s because of her “daddy issues.” Every life she lives and work she creates is viewed through and complicated by her femaleness – in lieu of herself she becomes a sister, a songstress, a daughter, a girlfriend, a Female Artist, a muse, overshadowed and simplified by a ghost of herself.

Alongside relationships to men, female identity is also often perceived through ownership of objects. In a capitalist, object-focused society, person and item exist in conjunction, and purchasing and consuming objects (and displaying them publicly) is a measure of social worth and wealth. This experience of consumer culture and capitalism is gendered, creating an artificiality that comes with womanhood and femininity; external pressures (fashion magazines, websites, external opinions, societal norms) dictating what to do about almost everything, both consciously and subconsciously. This bleeds into the digital realm – Instagram and other social media platforms exist as an ever-present backbone to modern womanhood but also as places where these structures run most visible and rampant. We, as women, are both the images used to market products and societal ideals, and the target audience.

My paintings explore the uncertainty of modern feminine authenticity, portraying complicated women in multiple states of being. The women in my paintings appear anxious, bored, hysteric, in love, regretful, at odds with themselves, at peace, posing, performing. They exist for themselves, while self-aware of the conditions in which they exist in and are viewed through. Their bodies are in a still dance; jutting out and gently grazing against the edges of the frame, spaces and shapes are abstracted into

flatness, creating a coexisting duality between “real” and “unreal,” mirroring a dichotomy between what is perceived and what is objective, what is performed and what is felt.

I consider my paintings indirect self-portraits, painted empathetically from my own experience with navigating womanhood. Though my paintings are forged first through autobiography, the women I paint are rarely specific. Their personalities are developed from aspects of myself and my friends, partners, and communities, but their ambiguity also relates to an overarching, pervasive cultural gaze — a gaze that has continually genericized, flattened, and objectified women. I paint navigating this gaze, and introspective and self-exploratory elements are key in both my execution and the viewing of my work.

Swathed in fields of color, my paintings are phenomenological portraits, openings into realms of queer space. Compositionally and thematically referencing vernacular photography, their bodies are contained in the frame, gazing back at the viewer in a knowing glance, or looking away, engaged in an action, or enraptured in an intimate relational moment. With both, they are refuting passivity, holding agency over their bodies and spaces and in the way that they could be perceived. As a woman and a lesbian painting mainly female subjects, my act is inherently political. As figurative paintings, they're in immediate dialogue with the artistic canon and its history of representation, but their scope of inquiry extends critically beyond the art world, upending and questioning existing ways of how women have and continue to be portrayed and viewed in this society largely centered around men. Informed by my own autobiographical experience and observation, I paint to navigate this realm of perception and to imagine a quiet utopia – an open realm that deconstructs and questions existing perceptions of women and queer people.

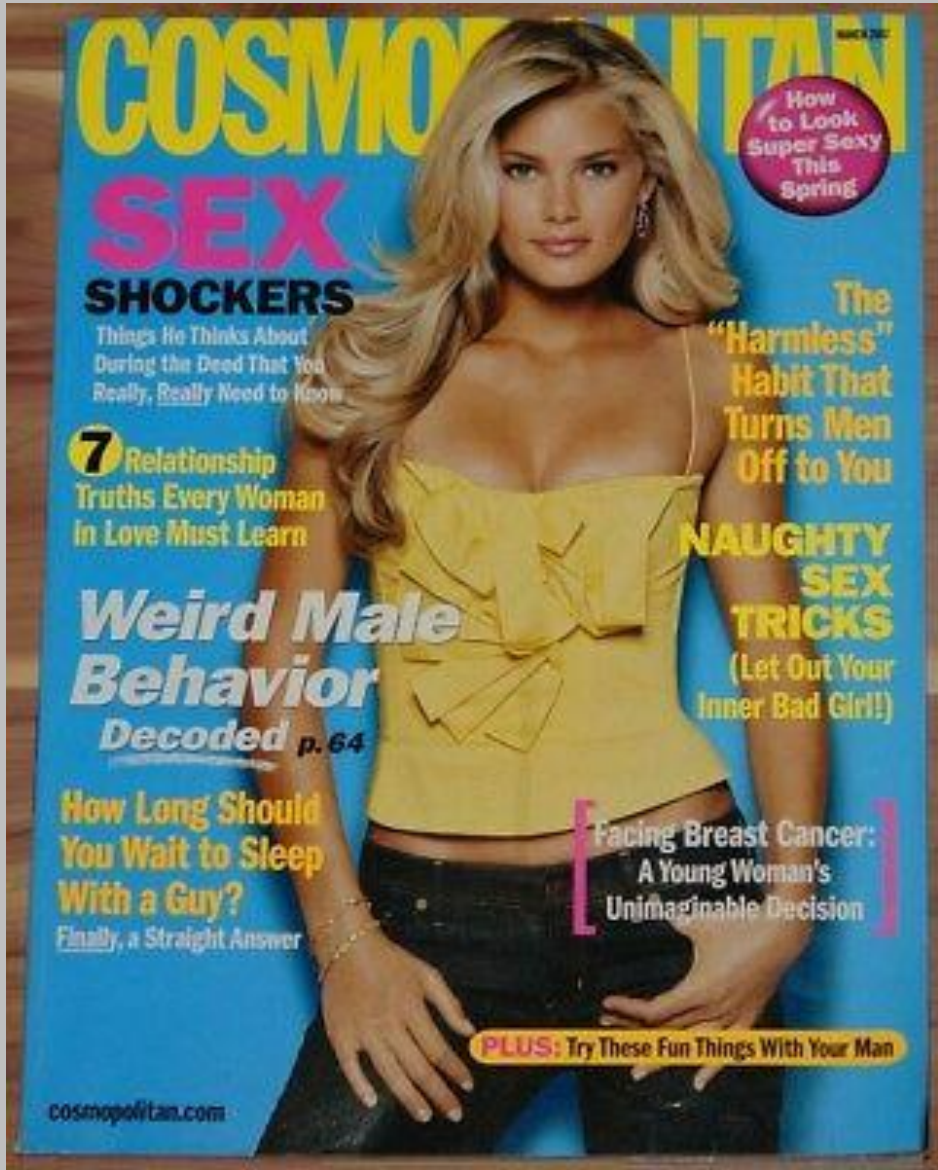


Natalie Strait UNC Chapel Hill MFA Thesis Defense April 29, 2020

“A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another....

One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object -- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.”

John Berger, Ways of Seeing



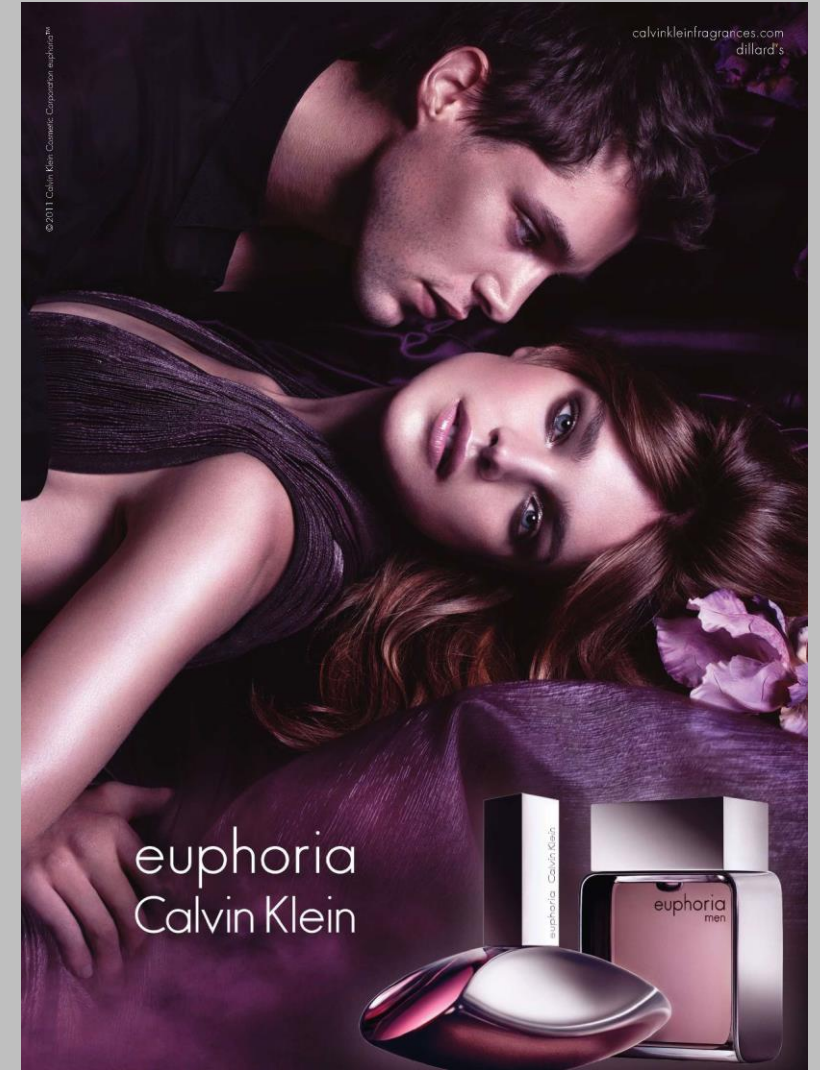
Cosmopolitan Magazine, March 2007



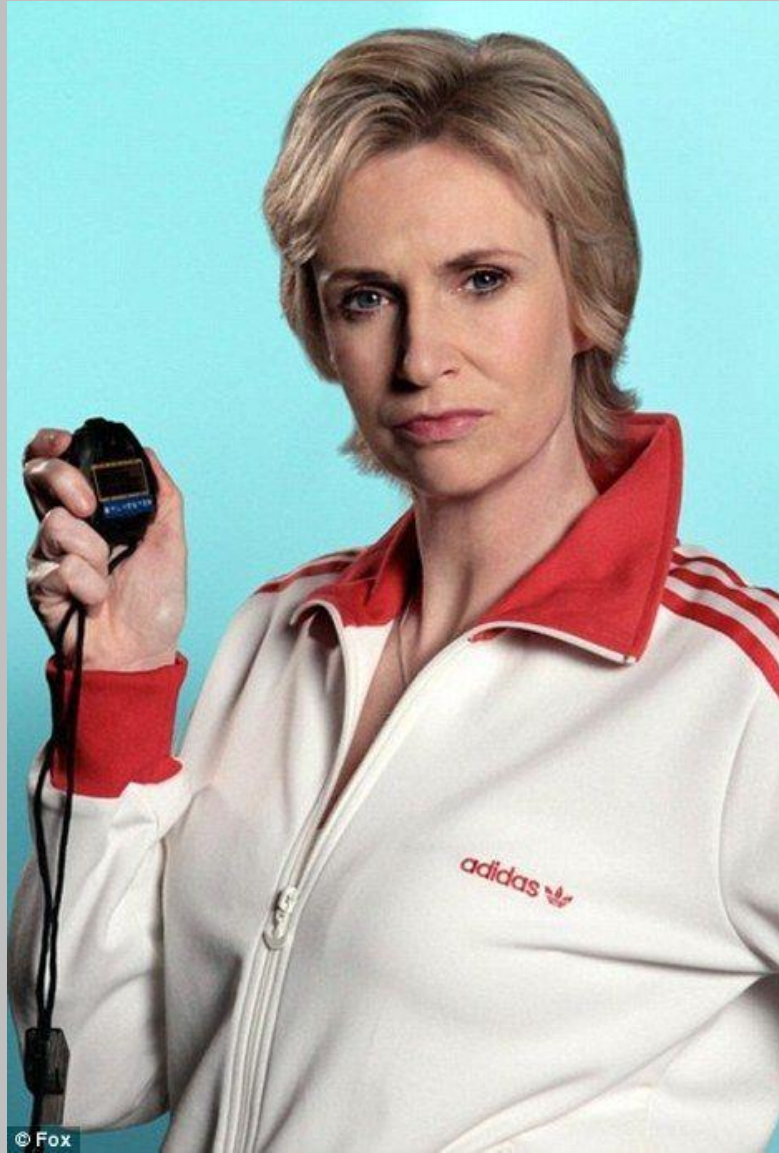
Megan Fox, 2008



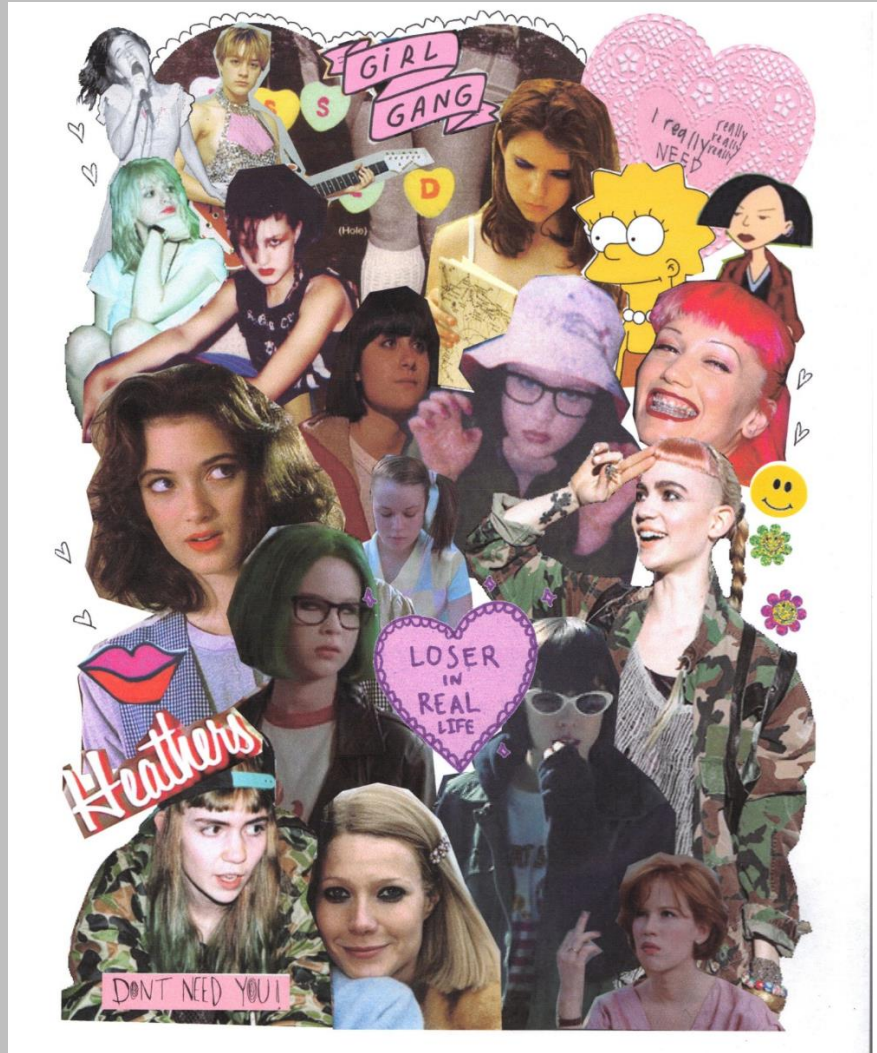
Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie, 2004



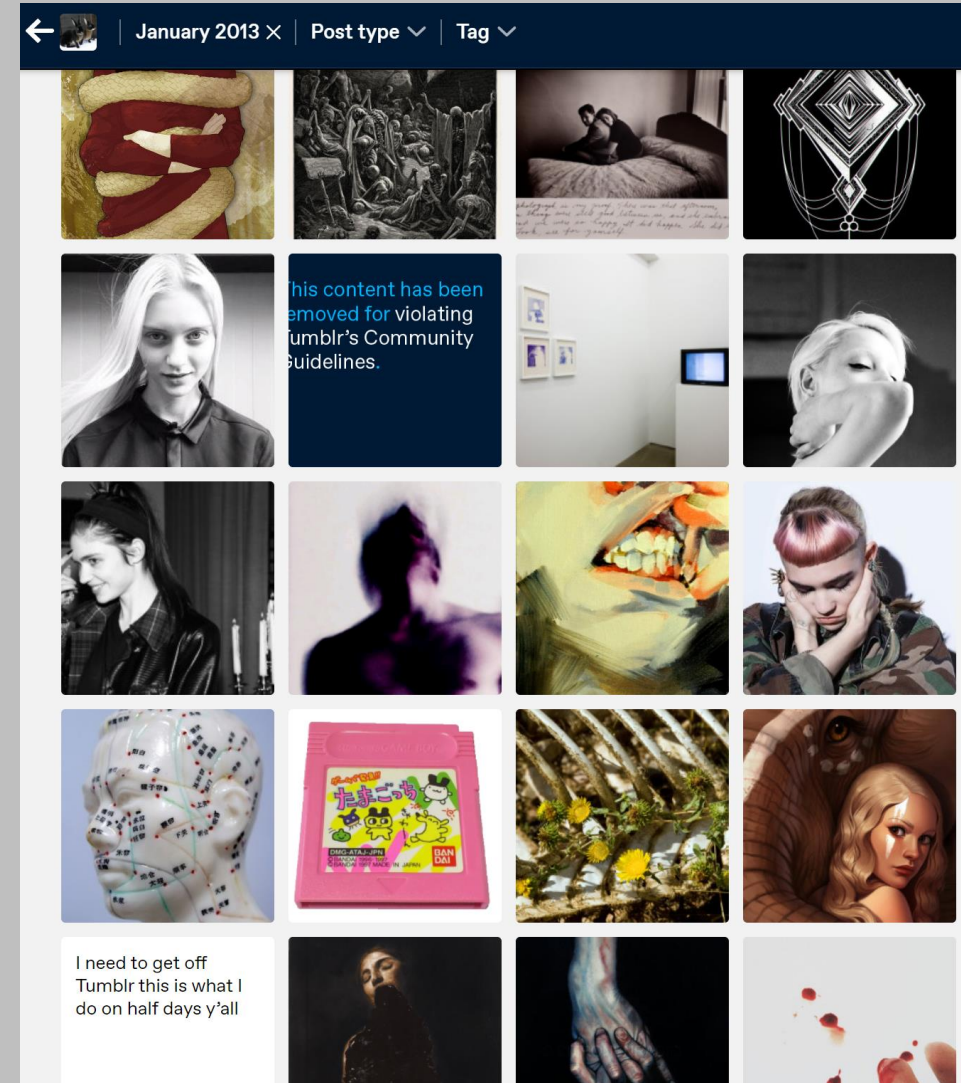
Calvin Klein Euphoria perfume ad, 2011



Jane Lynch as Sue Sylvester in
the tv show Glee



Screenshot of a Tumblr post I reblogged in January 2013, at the age of 15



Archive of my tumblr blog in January 2013



I have always loved shrines, so here's a selection from various homes over the years! Mine always include candles or fairy lights and lots of fake flowers. I also like them to have things made by friends: funny notes or pictures—anything that reminds me of loved ones. My mom has always had lots of shrines dotted around her home (I've included a few pictures!) so I suppose they remind me of home. —Lally

<https://www.rookiemag.com/2012/02/not-creepy-at-all/>



Still from the film Lady Bird (2017) dir. Greta Gerwig

How to Make Your Room Look Like a Movie

(Or a book.)

TAVI GEVINSON 12/12/2011

Ah, the crib. The “bachelor” “pad,” if you will. Is there any sanctuary so vital to the human experience as this, a place to just be away from everybody, listen to music, and procrastinate homework by lying in bed staring at the ceiling? I say no. Amid all the woes of teenage life, the bedroom is the one place you can make your own.*

Just listening to [Chloe Sevigny talk](#) about all the stuff she had on her walls as a teenager made me want to make sure my room was a good reflection of all the things I like as soon as possible. And so, I believe in the importance of filling it with the things that make you happy.

The movies (and one book) below are movies (and one book) that are especially visual, and each one kind of their own world. So, while I can't tell you exactly how to make your room look like Marie Antoinette's, I can offer up cheap ways to get the same eye-candy feelings you get watching Sofia Coppola's movie in your room—the colors, the sugariness. I am a genius, basically, is what I am trying to say.



I got all of this stuff from two trips to the thrift store. The total cost was probably less than \$15.

Rookie is no longer publishing new content, but we hope you'll continue to enjoy the



Still from the film Juno (2007) dir. Jason Reitman

<https://www.rookiemag.com/2011/12/tavi-room-decorating/>

the cut

I have gotten this advertisement 10 times probably and it is offensive because I absolutely would wear every item on this page

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hmmmmmm

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Screenshots from my archive of bizarre Instagram ads



Lonely Weekend
42x48"
Acrylic on canvas
2018



Party for Two
36x48"
Oil on canvas
2019



West Elm/Business Bitch
36x48"
Acrylic and chunky glitter on
canvas
2018





West Elm/Business Bitch
36x48"
Acrylic and chunky glitter on
canvas
2018



Rose All Day
46x52"
Oil and acrylic on canvas
2018



Still from 'Marie Antoinette' 2006, dir. Sofia Coppola



Viva Tempe
30x40"
Acrylic on canvas
2018



Blue Moon Friday
36x48"
Acrylic on canvas
2019



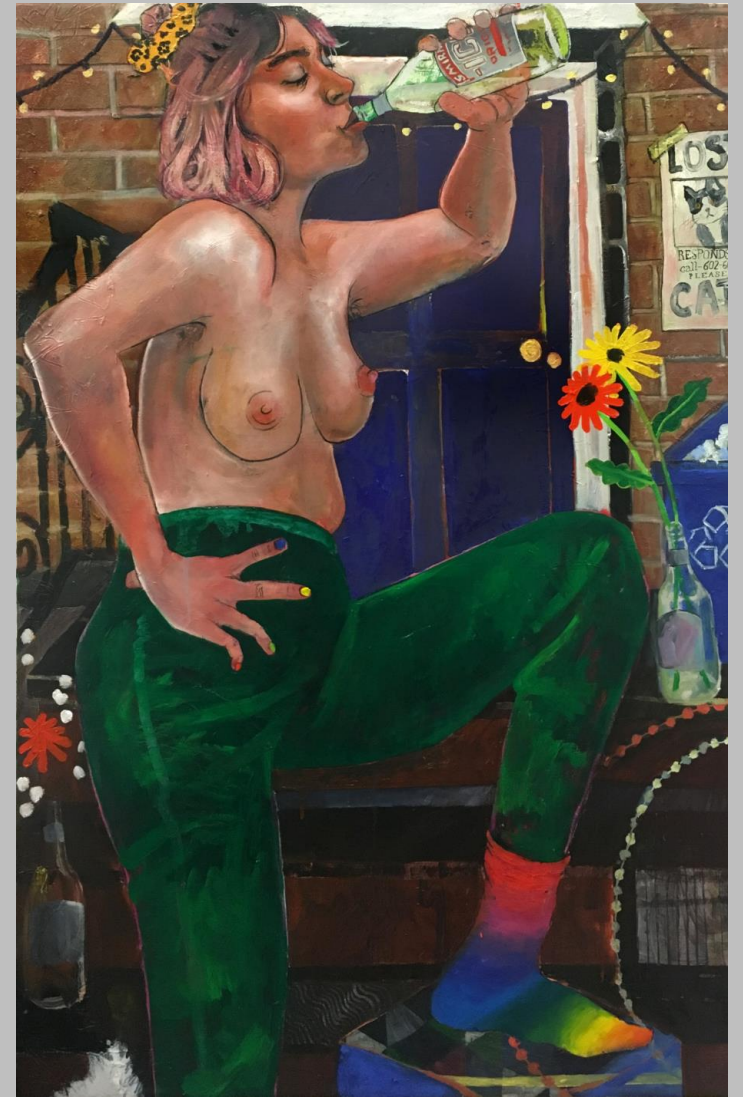
Iced
30x48"
Oil on canvas
2019



What hasn't been remarked on in all that press, however, is the misogyny inherent in the game. Women aren't allowed to play. It's a strictly "bro" game. "No ... anything with a vagina may not be included in icing," says one comment on the website brosicingbros.com. The game's premise -- the thing that is cracking up all those men with popped collars -- is the assumption that Smirnoff Ice is a "pussy" drink. "That's the whole fucking point bro. No one wants to chug a fucking smirnoff ice because it's for fags. It's like getting shamed. You have to chug a fag drink in front of all your bro's... ultimate humiliation. Any bro would want to chug a beer, but chugging a smirnoff ice is the ultimate slap in the face," says another commenter (reminding us that misogyny and homophobia are often bedfellows). Add to this the fact that a bro must go down on one knee while drinking an Ice, and the stage is set for an avalanche of sexist catcalls every time someone gets iced. "BOOM! YOU JUST GOT ICED TAKE A KNEE AND SUCK IT DOWN YOU DIRTY GIRL," says yet another comment.

Sure, some women **have been iced**. Others are mere accoutrements. "My friend has really big boobs ... we iced one of our other friends by putting the ice under her boobs and she walked out of the bathroom and put her boobs in his face," says an enthusiastic participant on brosicingbros.com. Some Ices get nestled between the breasts of strippers, whole bachelorette parties have been mobilized; surely there's a twin fantasy in there somewhere, etc.

https://www.salon.com/2010/06/15/bros_icing_bros/





Amy Adams

Amy Adams



 **margMD**
@margo_go_go_

me pretending to laugh at men's jokes so they don't murder me







Regret
Oil and acrylic on canvas
48x52"
2019



Default Windows XP Wallpaper



Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie, 2004



Crystal's Friend, John Currin

Oil on canvas, 2011

24 x 18 inches





BP Queen
Oil, acrylic, and chunky glitter on canvas
36x48"
2020



Florizona Gothic
oil on canvas
36x48"
2020



Basement Apartment Hottie
Oil on canvas
36x36"
2020





Henri Matisse
Odalisque au coffret rouge
1952



Me in my (terrible) summer
2019 basement apartment



Gilbert Baker

Artist, activist, drag queen, creator of the rainbow flag
(June 2, 1951 – March 31, 2017)

The original 1978 pride flag had 8 colors,
with symbolic meaning for each color

Hot pink		<i>Sex</i>
Red		<i>Life</i>
Orange		<i>Healing</i>
Yellow		<i>Sunlight</i>
Green		<i>Nature</i>
Turquoise		<i>Magic/Art</i>
Indigo		<i>Serenity</i>
Violet		<i>Spirit</i>

The Feminist Eco Village

A new type of society

Welcome

Welcome

The Jungle 2 Jungle project is a project to build an international eco feminist cashless village and refuge, the project does not charge rent, fees or any money at all, it is free to join and stay in. The village accepts people who are trans and is made up of people from all over the world with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

This village will provide for all of its food requirements with permaculture, and do as much as it can to be sustainable, both in terms of providing for all the needs of its members in the long term over hundreds of years and also in terms of protecting the environment.

The village will be free for all and will not be based on the values of capitalism, rather it will be based loosely on the values of Herland. This means there will be a number of differences between the novel and the eco village which of course should be expected considering the novel was written over 100 years ago. Differences include but are not limited to the fact that we include, people who are trans, people from all over the world, and internet.

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<http://jungle2jungle.org/>



Walking the Dog

Lisa Yuskavage

2009

Oil on linen

77 x 65 in.



Merlot

Lisa Yuskavage

2017

Oil on linen

34 x 24 in.



Blue Morpho (After Courbet)
36x48"

Acrylic, spray paint, chunky glitter, and
pearlescent pigment on canvas



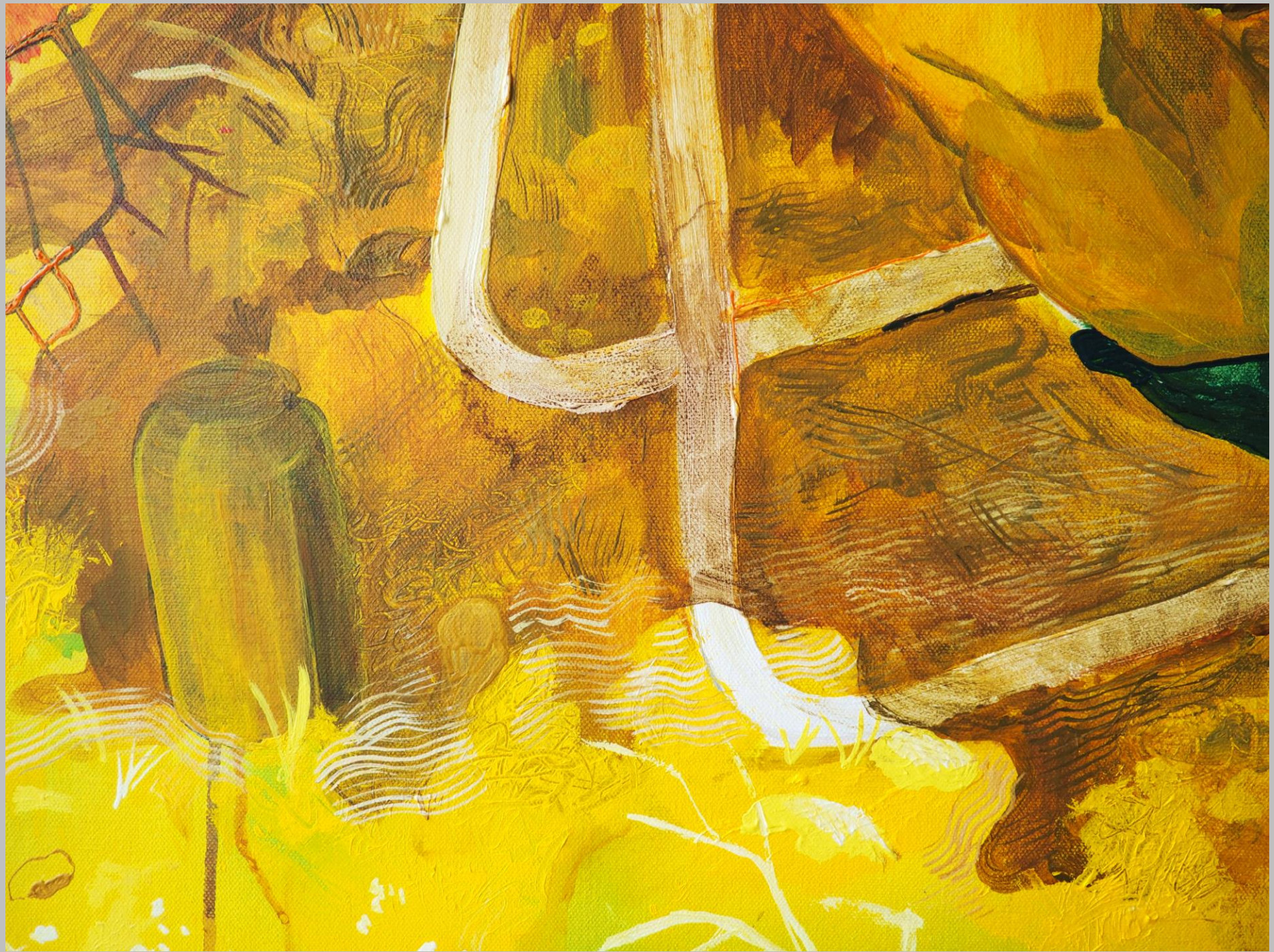
Le Sommeil (The Sleepers)
Gustave Courbet
135 cm × 200 cm (53 in × 79 in)
1866
Oil on canvas



Tangerine Lament
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas
36x48"
2020



Cactus Cooler/December Sunlight
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas
36x48"
2020





Tempe Rococo
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas
36x48"
2020





Cave Painting
Robin F. Williams
78" x 102"
oil on canvas
2014



Étant donnés (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas)
Marcel Duchamp
Sculptural diorama
36x48"
1946-1966

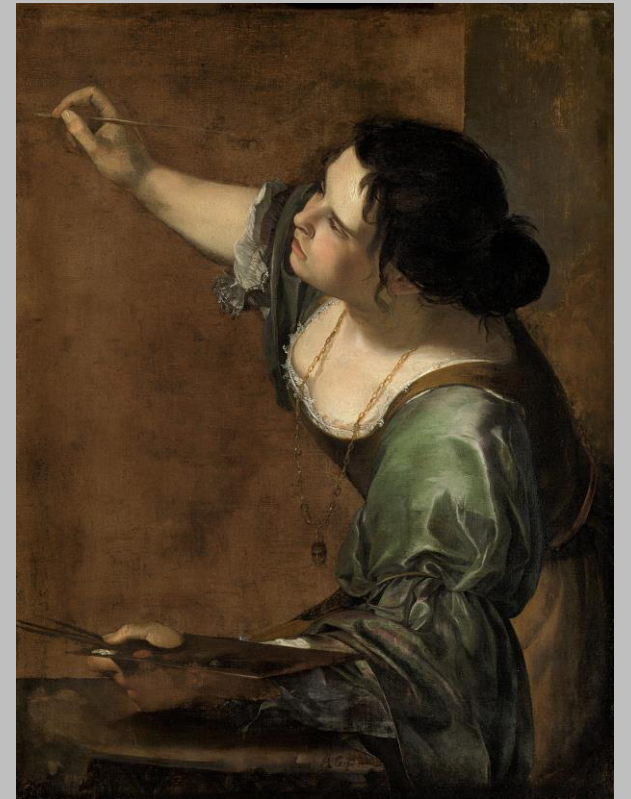




High Life
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas
36x48"
2020



Self-Portrait by Judith Leyster
Judith Leyster
Oil on canvas
c. 1633
74.6 cm (29.4 in) × 65.1 cm (25.6 in)



Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting
Artemisia Gentileschi
1638–39
Oil on canvas
96.5 cm × 73.7 cm (38.0 in × 29.0 in)

the end