



5-9-2022

There Is Sometimes A Buggy: Queering the Cowboy

Kelsey Gavin
Ursinus College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/art_hon
[Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Gavin, Kelsey, "There Is Sometimes A Buggy: Queering the Cowboy" (2022). *Art and Art History Honors Papers*. 3.
https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/art_hon/3

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art and Art History Honors Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. For more information, please contact aprock@ursinus.edu.

There Is Sometimes A Buggy: Queering The Cowboy

By: Kelsey Marie Gavin

May 10th, 2022

Submitted to the faculty of Ursinus College in fulfillment of the requirements for Honors
in Art & Art History

There Is Sometimes A Buggy: Queering The Cowboy

Project Description: For my honors thesis project and body of work for the ASE 2022, I will be interpreting stills from David Lynch's movie Mulholland Drive, sourcing from a singular four-minute scene referred to as The Cowboy scene. I will be recreating this scene in various mediums focusing on three central parts of the scene: The Cowboy, The Skull, and Adam Keshner. This project will examine and delve into the overall theme I have been exploring in my studio practice over the course of the past several years about how film and painting intertwine. For the ASE it will manifest as a series of works such as paintings, prints, a scale model and video work.

By: Kelsey Marie Gavin

Date: May 10th 2022

Advisor: _____

Prof. David Aipperspach

Committee members: _____

Prof. David Aipperspach

Prof. Sarah Kaufman

Prof. Cari Freno

Outside Evaluator: _____

Dr. Sheryl Goodman

Approved: _____

Prof. Cari Freno

This work is about obsession and absurdity. There was a certain freedom found in exorcising this moment from within myself. A peer once described my studio practice as “method acting” and I feel like this encompasses the totality of who I am and what I have been doing over the past year. This body of work focuses on not only on my queer identity but also marks my personal disturbance over the perverse amount of consumption of media and society’s unhealthy relationship with overconsumption.

For my honors thesis project and body of work for the Annual Student Exhibition 2022, I interpreted stills from David Lynch's movie *Mulholland Drive*, sourcing from a singular three-minute scene referred to as *The Cowboy* scene. I recreated this scene in various mediums focusing on three central parts of the scene: The Cowboy, The Skull, and Adam Keshner. This project will examine and delve into the overall theme I have been exploring in my studio practice over the course of the past several years about how film and painting intertwine, queerness, and overconsumption. For the exhibition, it manifested as a series of works such as paintings, prints, a scale model, and video work. It was one thing that then became many things: the centrality of the work didn’t change but the project shifted drastically over time and became all of these added layers and different moves which resulted in a large body of work.

The importance of creating across multiple mediums represents my desire to do and make as much as possible. When I think of myself as an artist, I am very prone to large bodies of work. I like making forty sketches and ten paintings with an intricate, backwards process. I get most of my thinking done while I work, so projects usually never end up how I first envision them and they tend to evolve into their own living, breathing, spurting, and bleeding entities. They develop over time as I act in conversation with the work. In a lot of ways, it feels as if I’m giving life to something that ultimately thinks for itself. On a primary basis, I’m thinking about painting and

film. Specifically, what I identify as a “painterly moment” in a film, which ranges from the way something is lit, the way props are set, it’s about the narrative and performance, and the creation of a world that becomes painterly to me. Acting in a lead up to the paintings, however, I was “sketching” or brainstorming across multiple mediums. The act of making in many different ways allowed me to approach the paintings in a more confident manner. For instance, the scale model allowed me to think about things like perspective, the manipulation of lighting, considering a three-dimensional world and how that translates to the two-dimensional world of the canvas through a kind of synthesis.

Appropriation art is absolutely central to the work as well. In addition to Lynch, I am also considering artists like Luc Tuymans, and those from the eighties “Pictures Generation” within my studio practice. The art of appropriation relies on sourced media as a basis for artmaking. Considering mediums such as movies, commercials, tv shows, celebrities, and so forth. Taking and ripping media from its source and recontextualizing it within a fine arts space. When I am considering what appropriation art means to me and how that is defined within my practice, I’m considering not only the appropriation of a source but how this source acts as ultimately a reflection of myself and my values. I project myself and my personal considerations when taking on a work, in one way or another it is approaching concepts that trouble me. This acts as a way to think through those things.

I feel as if a lot of good art functions the same way that good films function, there is a basis and a persistent notion of personal interpretation. The obsession with David Lynch began when I was young. In a swift succession, I had watched *Twin Peaks*, *Blue Velvet*, and *Mulholland Drive*. It was a moment where the worlds of art and cinema seemed to blend. Artful cinema to me is made up of three aspects that I have come to identify as: narrative, lighting, and

scene framing. Growing up I watched a lot of movies, particularly going into my teenage years, in addition to growing up in the arts and the process of making. This discovery happened at a time when one just begins to figure out who they think they are and what they're into. It was a very cursory discovery that just opened the floodgates for me. From there on, David Lynch has always been at the back of my mind and in my contemporary toolkit.

I want to discuss the idea of anamorphosis: a being existing within and outside the diegetic world of a film and in this case, consider some critical lenses of Lynch's work and scholarly dissection of *the cowboy* scene. One author reflected on something that I found to be incredibly compelling when beginning this project, the concept of the cowboy as an anamorphic figure. The author, Toby Fabijancic, identified anamorphosis as "appearing almost simultaneously with perspective as a mode of organizing sight in visual art and architecture mainly, anamorphosis was a "form of eccentric perspective, popular in the 16th and 17th centuries, in which an image that was severely distorted, but according to perspectival principles, if seen 'awry', became suddenly legible" (Fabijancic)

Immediately, this hit things that I was thinking about, about connections between the visual arts and film. I liked this concept of illegible eccentricity applying to the cowboy. The author goes on to expand on how this anamorphosis within the film, and the illegibility of the cowboy, acts as a being that exists on multiple planes of existence.

There remains the biggest question which is why? Why take the cowboy and insert him in the fine arts space? What does the work do? What is the function in an art space? For me, I approach this in several ways. My first consideration is that of gender as performance, the concept of "method acting" within my studio practice and embodying two men in the creation of my film. The work is inherently queer. As a queer person, my identity exists innately within the

work and across the entire body of it. The act of being made by a queer hand in addition to the questions I have been asking of myself and within myself seem to become present in this work. I've never felt entirely like a woman. There is a projection of what it means to be a woman in the world, and I have never identified with that. I have always felt a profound confusion when it comes to my gender identity and who I am. I was never feeling entirely like a woman, but I am certainly not a man, and there seemed to be an anamorphosis within my own life and within me. I feel as if I am existing in multiple spaces and there seems to be an impossibility in identifying that and pinning that down.

I remember when first viewing the film as a young teenager, having come to terms with the fact that I'm gay, I found myself identifying more with the cowboy and Adam Kesher than I did either of the two female leads, who ultimately engage in a lesbian relationship within the capacity of the film. This project acts as an embrace of my queerness. I am a gay, woman-adjacent person. The flux I feel within my gender became apparent in my rendition of the cowboy scene. Dressing myself as two men and acting out a scene with myself in a blacked-out room felt neurotic and obsessed, yet cathartic. It was an exorcism.

The recentering of the cowboy in a queer space became this accessible rendition of a primarily masculine, American archetype translating to a bizarre dichotomy to who I am. A queer woman, constantly in flux versus this outwardly male, all knowing, seemingly omniscient presence. I like to consider my gender and queerness as the anamorphic character in my life, contrasting that of the cowboy. It exists on multiple planes of being and it is threaded throughout my entire life.

On a broader scale, I considered the concept of consumption within the life of a person. Any person. With most media available at our fingertips, we are flooded and overwhelmed with

consuming. Whether that's material goods, visual media, art, and so on. There is something perverse about the amount we consume. A perverse overconsumption that feels suffocating to me. As a result of that, I like the idea of sticking with something for a long period of time. I think there is a hidden beauty in a very slow burn. A lot of the things I'm tackling within my studio practice directly engage with the act of consumption. I've had the same three minutes on my mind for the past decade and living in a world where we are meant to consume a lot and remember a little, three minutes can get completely lost and that to me is horrifying. The sheer amount that there is out there to watch and consume is something I find particularly daunting. I feel like this is a key part of my studio practice as well, at the center, there is a want to immortalize and sustain moments and to tear something down to its bones so you can't possibly forget it.

My response to overconsumption is the need to stick with something for a sense of security because the thought of it makes me anxious. Everyone seems to be on to whatever is new and next and there is something about that, that disturbs me. I have a desire to slow down in my approach to the world which I feel like comes out in the work, being stuck in a three-minute moment and working only within that space. You become knowledgeable of all things beholden within that one thing. It then becomes about all the little things. Facial expressions. Cues. Little easter eggs you might not have noticed before. That's the part that I feel responds to the amount of consumption— the solution is the ability to slow down. I want viewers to slow down, I've always felt like the world around me is moving at one hundred miles per hour and as a person and an artist it feels good to stop and analyze one thing for a period and stick with something. To depart from the overstimulation of a day-to-day life. Being able to unplug from all other things and let what is in front of you unfold.

This body of work also functions as a revelation and resolution of self-conflict. In my rendition of the scene, I am speaking to myself in a blacked-out room, I become both characters, costuming myself as them and appropriating their affect. I am bringing my internal conflicts over gender and mental health to the surface in a subverted manner. In a way, it is acting as if I'm at a coming to terms with myself to take control of my life and to "drive the buggy". I think that something that stood out to me instantly when viewing the film in the capacity of the gallery was the portion of dialogue starting with, "there is sometimes a buggy..." the asking of myself "how many drivers does a buggy have" with the call-and-response of "one." It is a coming together of the portions of myself that felt diametrically opposed with one another at one time. The manic. The depressive. The neurotic. The obsessed. The feminine. The masculine.

Body of Work & **Figures**



Figure 1: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Cow Skull and Lamp, Prop



Figure 2: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot

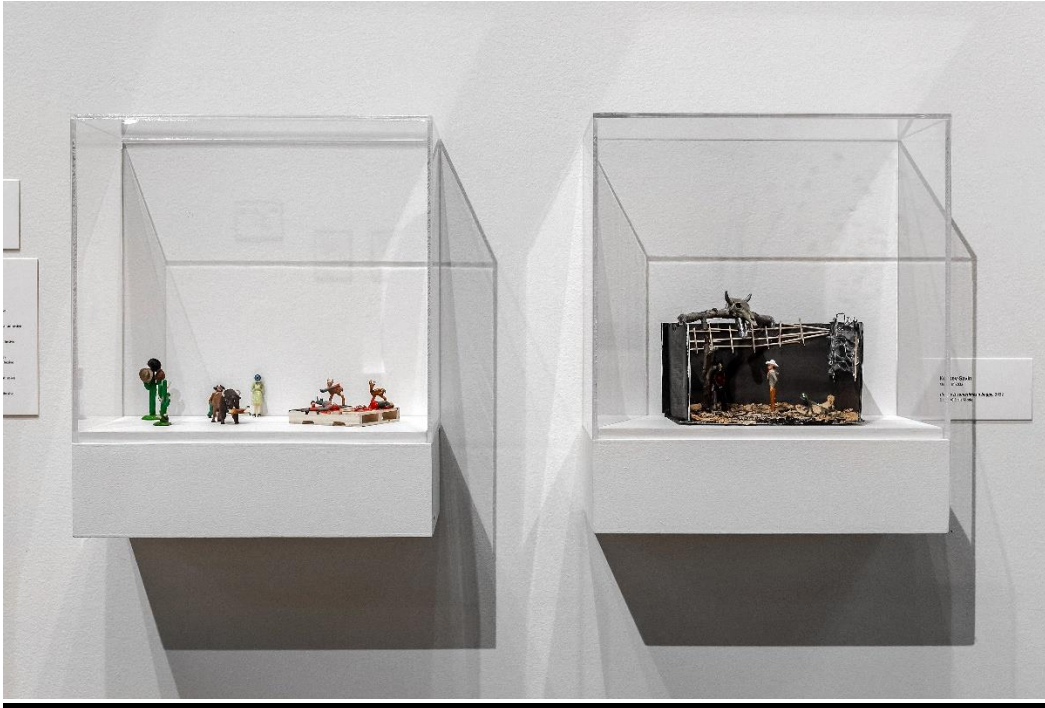


Figure 3: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Small Works, Installation Shot

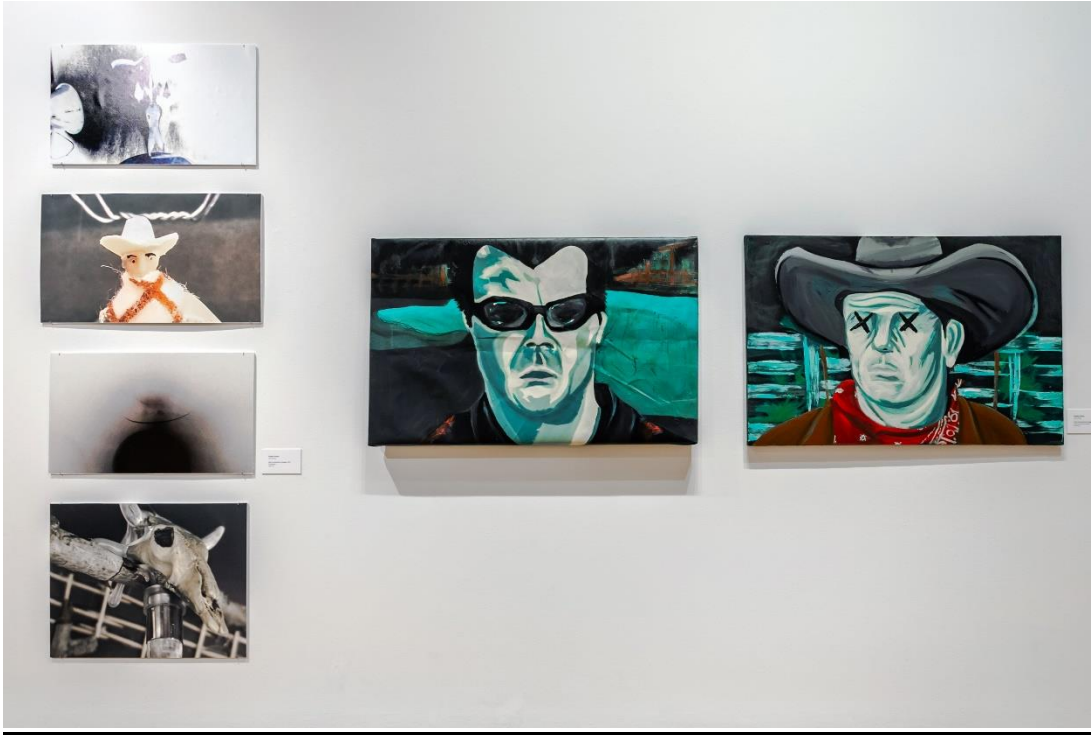


Figure 4: There is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot



Figure 5: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot



Figure 6: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot



Figure 7: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot



Figure 8: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot



Figure 9: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot

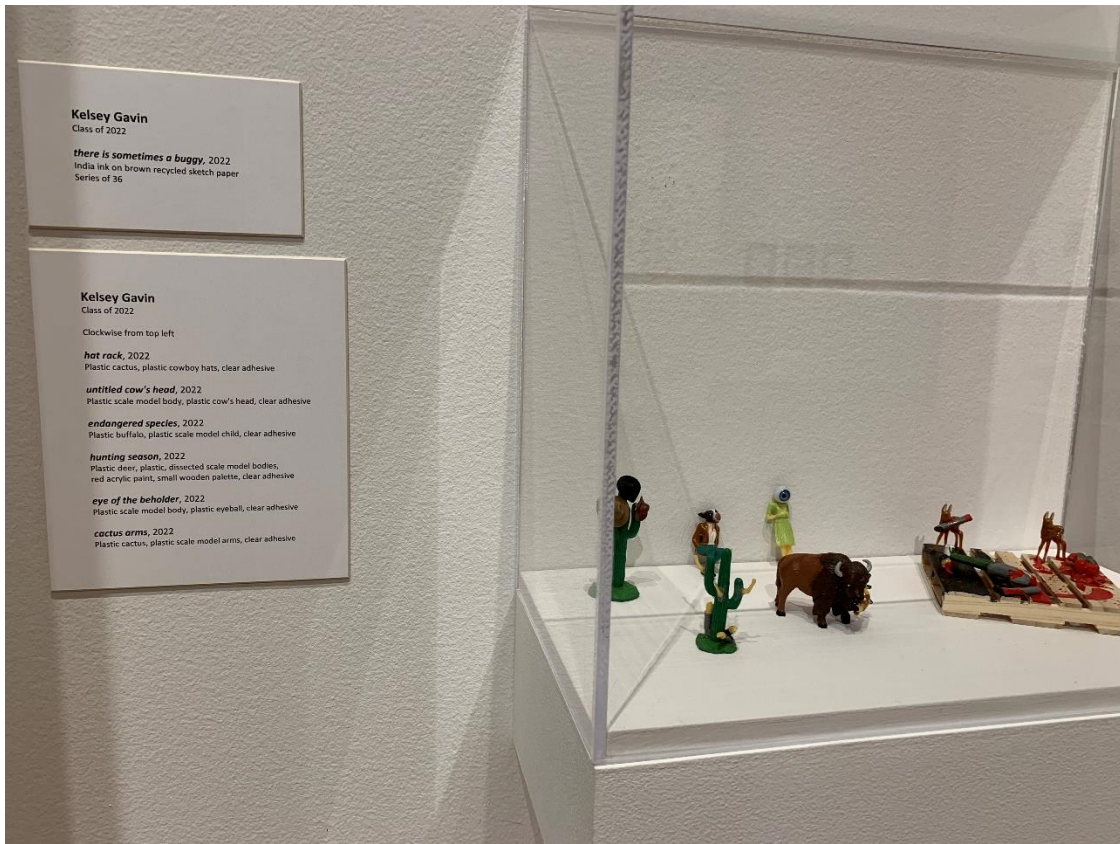


Figure 10: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot



Figure 11: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot



Figure 12: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot



Figure 13: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Installation Shot

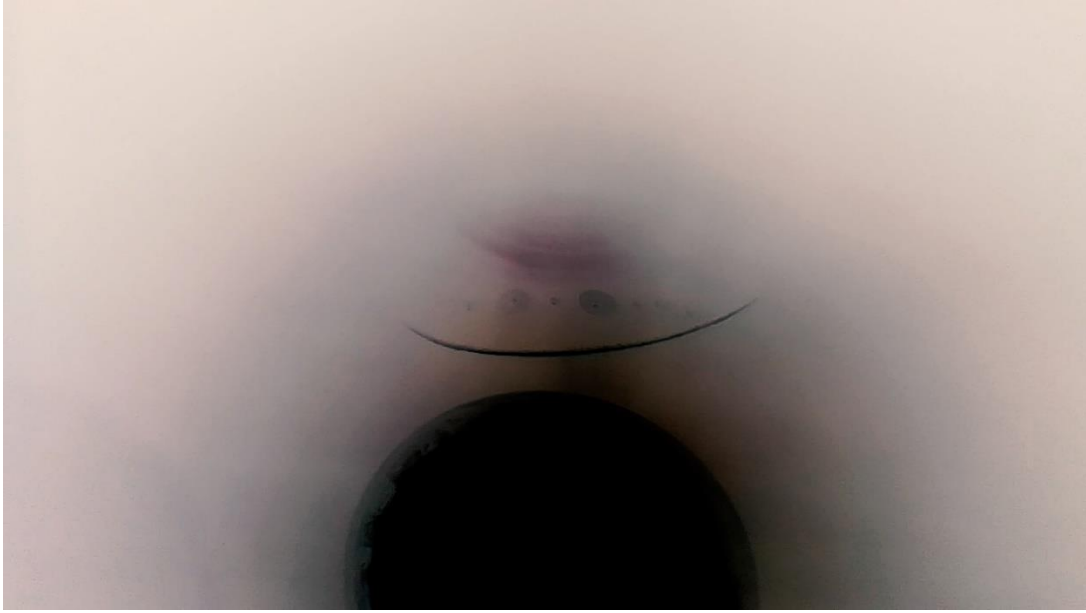


Figure 14: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Film Still



Figure 15: There Is Sometimes A Buggy, Film Still

Title	Date	Medium and support	Number of works in title	Dimensions (per piece in title)	For sale	Foam core mount (photography only)	Foam core with mat window	Pedestals	Lattice frame (optional)	Additional text (i.e. artist statement or extended object text)	Additional needs (describe)
EXAMPLE: Self-Portrait											
there is sometimes a buggly	2019	Oil and ink on canvas	1	20" X 24 inches	No		X				
there is sometimes a buggly	2022	Film/Video and sound work	2	n/a	no			yes, two (for two pedestals)			
there is sometimes a buggly	2022	(Janky) Scale Model	1	10" by 14" (rough estimate)	no						wall shelf needed
there is sometimes a buggly Series of 2	2022	Acrylic on Canvas, Stretched	1	28" by 44"	Yes						
there is sometimes a buggly Series of 4	2022	Photography	2	10" by 24"	Yes	X	X				
there is sometimes a buggly Series of 30	2022	India ink on brown recycled sketch paper	30 (rough estimate could be more)	each sketch is 6" by 12"	Yes			yes			these are going to function as an installation
there is sometimes a buggly	2022	Cow skull with lamp, prop	1		no						
there is sometimes a buggly	2022	Cowboy hat, prop	1								
cactus arms	2022	Plastic cactus, plastic scale model arms, clear adhesive	1		no					yes	
hat rack	2022	Plastic cactus, plastic cowboy hats, clear adhesive	1		no					yes	
untitled cow's head	2022	Plastic scale model body, plastic cow's head, clear adhesive	1		no					yes	
eye of the beholder	2022	Plastic scale model body, plastic eyeball, clear adhesive	1		no					yes	
endangered species	2022	Plastic buffalo, plastic scale model Ohio, clear adhesive	1		no					yes	
hunting season	2022	Plastic deer, plastic, disassembled scale model bodies, red acrylic scale model wooden panels, clear adhesive	1		no					yes	

Figure 16: List of Works as Submitted to the Berman Museum of Art in Preparation for the Annual Student Exhibition.

Artist Statement:

My artwork is a culmination of personal experiences ranging from childhood to adulthood, as well as the impact different forms of media have had on my artistic practice. I use a variety of photographic and audio/visual references in my work, often as the starting point for a new project. I use different forms of contemporary media as a means of reference in my work as well. Many works come directly appropriated from sources such as film stills from a variety of films and photographs. I am heavily influenced by the media I consume in my studio practice.

My current work reflects the pushing of my studio work in the direction of working in tandem with image appropriation rooted in a specific scene from David Lynch's film *Mulholland Drive*, referred to as "The Cowboy Scene." It's this brief three-minute interaction between two characters, Adam Kesher, a skeptical movie director, and a man only referred to as "The Cowboy," a mysterious, anamorphic entity meeting with Adam to discuss what he needs to do with his movie. It was something about this unsettling, brief exchange that sparked obsession within me. I began interpreting "The Cowboy Scene" through a variety of mediums— painting, photography, filmmaking, the completion of an incredibly shitty scale model, and dozens of India ink sketches. This scene combined with the practice of painting and making has pushed the moment of tension that I find so alluring within the crossroads of fine art and film. I think that a lot of films operate on a painterly level; to me, the way some films can be interpretive also work in the way that art can be interpretive.

This work is about obsession, it's about interpretation, and an exorcism within myself. I'm keen on very large bodies of work; I find myself wanting to maximize my ideas with a body of work that serves to contextualize my practice as a painter.

References

Fabijancic, Tony. "Anamorphosis in David Lynch's Mulholland Drive." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 89.2 (2020): 219-238.