

Fall 2022

INSTINCT

Eric Sanders

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd>



Part of the [Graphic Design Commons](#), and the [Illustration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sanders, Eric, "INSTINCT" (2022). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 2520.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/2520>

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Fall 2022

INSTINCT

Eric Sanders

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd>



Part of the [Graphic Design Commons](#), and the [Illustration Commons](#)

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

INSTINCT

by

ERIC SANDERS

(Under the Direction of Jason Hoelscher)

ABSTRACT

There is a convergence point of my interests that I explore in this body of work. As a service member and wildlife enthusiast, I pursue not only an outlet for my own creative expression and illustrative ambitions, but a platform to support creative advocacy for military service members and their families. With the principles of relational aesthetics and art as social practice supporting illustrative and design-centric work, I have found that convergence. This dream continues to manifest in Noble Instinct Artworks, a creative-based company I founded that incorporates the fine art methodology, business practices, and artistic collaboration with outreach potential moving forward.

INDEX WORDS: Wildlife art, Illustration, Advocacy, Military, Relational aesthetics, Adjacent possibilities, Collaboration, Creative entrepreneurship

INSTINCT

by

ERIC SANDERS

B.F.A., Georgia Southern University, 2018

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

© 2022

ERIC SANDERS

All Rights Reserved

INSTINCT
by
ERIC SANDERS

Major Professor: Jason Hoelscher
Committee: Marc Moulton
Jeff Garland
Elsie Hill

Electronic Version Approved:
December 2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Nothing I have done would have been possible without the continuous love and support of my family and friends. It would be equally impossible for me to be here at this milestone without the insightful, meticulous, and sometimes challenging guidance of artists who helped along the path. I owe much to who I am to the mentorship and camaraderie of those I have had the privilege to serve with over these years. To all who have raised their right hand to swear service to this country, thank you for everything that you do.

Finally, in such a tumultuous period of life, it cannot be expressed in words how grateful I am for those who believed in me. That has been a blessing beyond measure.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	2
LIST OF FIGURES	4
CHAPTER	
1: INTRODUCTION.....	5
2: AN INTERSECTION OF MILITARY SERVICE AND ART	7
3: MYTH, MONSTERS, MUSEUMS, AND MFA STUDIES.....	20
4: THE POWER OF ART AND COMMUNITY	30
5: NOBLE INSTINCT.....	37
6: INSTINCT EXHIBITION	47
7: CONCLUSION	53
REFERENCES.....	55

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Eric Sanders, <i>Into the Night</i> , Page 12, 2015	7
Figure 2: Eric Sanders, <i>Dichotomy: Whimsy and War</i> , 2018.....	9
Figure 3: Eric Sanders, <i>Hello, Friend</i> , 2018	11
Figure 4: Still from kinetic creativity event, 2018.....	13
Figure 5: Larry Selman, <i>Drop Zone: St. Mere Eglise</i> , 2008	15
Figure 6: Eric Sanders, <i>Catharsis II</i> , 2020.....	17
Figure 7: Eric Sanders, <i>Catharsis IV</i> , 2020.....	18
Figure 8: Eric Sanders, <i>Deep Sea Creature Study Sketches</i> , 2019	21
Figure 9: Eric Sanders, <i>Initial Cetus Design Sketch III</i> , 2019.....	22
Figure 10: Albertus Seba, Page from <i>Thesaurus</i> , circa 1734	24
Figure 11: Eric Sanders, Cetus silicone sculpture, 2019.....	27
Figure 12: Eric Sanders, Cetus silicone sculpture, 2020.....	28
Figure 13: Mark “Crash” McCreery, <i>Tyrannosaurus Rex</i> , 1991	30
Figure 14: Tim Rollins, K.O.S., <i>Amerika VIII</i> , 1987	34
Figure 15: Morgan (U.S. Army), <i>Kato Concept Sketches</i> , 2021	36
Figure 16: Elizabeth (U.S. Air Force), <i>Kato Concept Sketch</i> , 2021	36
Figure 17: Eric Sanders, <i>Alligator</i> , 2019.....	38
Figure 18: Eric Sanders, <i>Red Paper Wasp</i> , 2021	39
Figure 19: Eric Sanders, <i>Dodo</i> , 2020.....	40
Figure 20: Morgan (U.S. Army), <i>Fox Leap</i> , 2021	42
Figure 21: <i>Knock and Talk, Stoned Vet, Vertical Momentum</i> digital flyer, 2021.....	44
Figure 22: Eric Sanders, <i>Iguana</i> , 2022.....	45
Figure 23: <i>Instinct</i> Installation Shot 1, 2022	47
Figure 24: <i>Instinct</i> Installation Shot 2, 2022	48
Figure 25: Eric Sanders, <i>Kraken</i> , 2022	49
Figure 26: Eric Sanders, <i>Kraken</i> Label Detail 1, 2022	49
Figure 27: Eric Sanders, <i>Kraken</i> Label Detail 2, 2022	50
Figure 28: Eric Sanders, <i>Blue Crab</i> , 2022.....	51
Figure 30: <i>Instinct</i> Installation Shot 3, 2022	52

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“I’ve got your six.”

That brief phrase encompasses the core ethos across all six Armed Forces branches of the United States military. Remove the jargon and it simply translates to: “I’m looking out for you.” The paradigm that every individual is there to support the team is critical for mission success. The individual is lauded, praised, and promoted based upon the benefit provided for the unit as a whole.

In my own creative endeavors, that notion never left me. My previous years in the Army and time now as a current member of the Air National Guard has greatly informed my approach to art and its applications. I don’t examine my work in terms of what it will do just for me, but how my skills and interests can be shared with others. I believe art can only exist as a social practice. It is a form of communication we have with one another. Remove humans from the equation and art ceases to exist.

Additionally, the natural world has long been a source of inspiration and wonder for humanity, but in the digital age this aspect can be easy to overlook. Pressure from our hectic schedules sometimes prevents us from taking the time to appreciate the grandeur of the world and the creatures who share it. My intention with much of my work is to place emphasis on the animals that inhabit the environments with and around us. The pieces highlight the uniqueness of different species and present them at “Lifescale,” a term I’ll discuss more in-depth further on but is essentially a one-to-one reflection with their living counterparts. In the same way viewers will

pause a moment to take in a painting, drawing or sculpture, it is the hope that the artwork will serve as a reminder to do the same for the living world.

As the creatures of the planet continuously inspire me, I'm passionate about working toward a future where new generations will be able to enjoy an environment full of diversity and curiosity. Whether through a percentage of sales or just getting the viewer to think more about wildlife, I strive to ensure the work is contributing to the protection and preservation of this incredible planet.

Two sides of the coin, two aspects that drive the creative pursuits. So much of my time and effort has been devoted not only to the pursuit of these aspects but finding the union of them. The convergence exists within me, it fuels me, and has struggled to manifest outwardly over these past years. It is in the connection that I find greatest creative fulfillment.

CHAPTER 2

AN INTERSECTION OF MILITARY SERVICE AND ART

It was working with both veterans and creativity that prompted a major adjustment of my professional trajectory in the first place. The intended plan was to make the Army my full-time career while enjoying art only as a hobby. I had filled my early college electives with foundational art classes for a Criminal Justice major, and they soon became the courses I devoted the most effort to. I did not dislike the other subjects, but they didn't ignite the same fire that the time in the studio did. It became evident as I devoted more time outside of class to the studio, that I had underestimated my passion for creativity.



Figure 1. Eric Sanders, *Into the Night, Page 12*, 2015

With this new experience, I began to weigh the options of pursuing an art degree, calling advisors in between classes to get an idea of cost, requirements, and if I had the skills necessary

to even be accepted. It felt like a long shot, a pipe dream, but each drawing I completed only served to transform the impossible dream into a plausible goal. A career in the arts became the goal – despite the constant reinforcement throughout my life that art “wasn’t a job” or “there’s no money in it.” As a hobby, it was perfectly fine, but as a profession? I really just didn’t believe that was an option.

My indecision reached the tipping point as fellow service members began to ask if I could teach them about art. It started with being asked if I could just show them the basics. I hardly felt qualified to teach anything but agreed to share what knowledge I had. It was all very informal. A few of my friends would meet up, we would make some food, then put pencil to paper. Being nearly entirely self-taught at the time, I did not have the basis for formally articulating the elements and principles of design, but the sessions and quantity of participants increased.

Doing this over the course of a few months led to my first attempt to organize a platform for veterans to create and share their artwork. The result had the clumsy name of Artist Heart/Soldier Blood, but it provided valuable learning experiences in organizational leadership and artwork presentation. The one and only event that Artist Heart/Soldier Blood appeared at was the Cocoa Village Art Fair, a massive arts and crafts festival, in Cocoa, Florida. Beneath our pixelated logo banner was work from a dozen veterans and members of their families. The event did well and the engagement at the booth was high.

After the event, the general response from the involved veterans was bewilderment. “My pieces sold? Are you sure? How did that happen?” There was a belief that no one would attribute a monetary value to their creations and a sense of shock when that turned out to be untrue.

Seeing the impact those moments had on the veterans, the way it made them reassess the value of their creative efforts, solidified the decision to transition to the arts.



Figure 2. Eric Sanders, *Dichotomy: Whimsy and War* Installation, 2018

I soon made the easy decision of beginning BFA studies at Armstrong University. There, I found tremendous challenge and joy in formally learning about artistic techniques and history. As I closed in on the final year of undergraduate studies, the approach toward reaching veterans evolved. As part of the Third Infantry Division, many of those within my unit disparaged the idea of art. They held the assumption that creativity would be unrelatable and unenjoyable for them. Several colorful phrases were expressed about these feelings, and yes, most of them were vulgar. I pondered how to bridge this gap. I wondered if a blend of creative output with something more familiar to the veteran community could serve as a gateway for them to the larger artworld.

An important moment in my progress of becoming an artist, creator, and advocate came in 2018. Without giving an explanation, I met up with a few friends at a private gun range armed

with painter's tape, assorted spray paint colors, and canvases. The veterans created designs on canvases using painters' tape then set those canvases up beside cans of spray paint. After a quick safety check, cameras started rolling and bullets started impacting cans. The cloudy explosion of colors elicited an immediate reaction. The atmosphere had dramatically changed. What started as polite humoring became engaged enthusiasm. There was a desire to experiment with different calibers and ranges to produce different effects with the paint. While this itself may not be considered fine art of the highest caliber, it kickstarted the creative energy and that skepticism turned to an enthusiastic urge to try different thing. It became a gateway that opened options over the next years.

With this new sense of artistic interaction, many of the veterans I worked with began to open up more about their experiences during their service. This informed my graduation exhibition as I paired intense personal anecdotes with the more free-spirited illustrations that made up the BFA show, *Dichotomy*. Each of the three BFA students in the exhibition presented a duality in our work and our concepts. For me, it was *Whimsy and War*. At the time, I was playing with light-hearted ideas in my art – especially with CGI – while also grappling with some of those darker veteran issues. The prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress in friends and fellow service members began to become more evident as, for example, it became increasingly common to have safety stand-downs because someone in the unit had succumbed to their struggles.

In many ways, the lighter side of things shown in the work, like *Hello, Friend*, helped with coping with these heavier themes that I was both researching and seeing manifest firsthand. While putting together the work for that show, it was interesting to view the exhibition as a reflection of my own passions. I am an advocate for awareness for veteran issues and community

health, but I also love sculpting dinosaurs and illustrating wildlife. In many ways, I felt like I was missing something if I only focused on one or the other. Those are aspects that I felt, and still feel, represent my ideal creative output.



Figure 3. Eric Sanders, *Hello, Friend*, 2018

While working on the BFA show, I began to really consider what I wanted to do after graduating. During those studies, one of the primary challenges I faced from the veteran perspective was presenting creativity in a way the military community would respond to. For many, particularly those from the War on Terror generation, there is a knee-jerk reaction to disregard art. Or, stated more accurately, to disregard what they perceive art to be. If there was interest in the arts among previous generations, for example during the introduction of the GI Bill and the war in Vietnam, this did not apply to younger service members, many of whom had

gone through schools without art programs. The more I talked with fellow service members about art, the more apparent it became that what was lacking was an entry point. Without a relatable way for them to connect to art, the possibilities of the creative world would remain elusive.

With these insights, a few ideas came to mind, chief among them starting a veteran non-profit. This led to an important step in development, a second attempt at building a military-focused creative advocacy organization called Warrior Art. With a stronger foundation of knowledge in the arts and a bit more business sense, I began drafting the paperwork for a 501(c)3 non-profit company and considering ideas moving forward.

Looking back to the previous project with paint cans, the apparent option was to continue to incorporate firearms. Shooting sports are highly popular for service members, both in and out of uniform. The initial plans to blend shooting and art were nebulous. In the spirit of creative experimentation, I purchased balloons, acrylic paint, and cheap spray paint along with a few multi-packs of canvas. The trial run of this idea was less about engaging veterans and more about testing what processes would (or would not) work. While the paint filled balloons were unimpressive, we quickly discovered that the pressurized cans reacted differently when punctured by different calibers. For example, the small .22 round would nick the can, causing a highly volatile spray and splatter as the can spun out of control along the ground; a shotgun would create multiple small openings and random patterns; the .308 rifle would simply disintegrate the can into a uniform mist. These different approaches allowed for controlled chaos depending on the desired effect. Everything from soft gradients to harsh thick splatters could be manipulated depending on the variables of the shot and round used. This control would open creative and expressive possibilities. What we started calling Kinetic Art, borrowing the term

and making it our own, appeared to have potential both as a weird form of creativity and a means of sharing the joy of experimentation.



Figure 4. Still from Kinetic Art creativity event

After this, the planning process for Warrior Art spun into high gear at the same time as I was finishing the BFA exhibition. I incorporated a raffle that would use the proceeds toward helping fund the next creative-veteran events. I designed flyers showcasing the kinetic art to hand out leading up to the exhibition to telegraph my next phase. It was the hope that after completing undergraduate studies, I would begin building a veteran-centric non-profit organization.

That was not the case.

In researching the requirements for 501(c)3, I discovered the idea and intentions would not neatly fit into that category. The vision for the non-profit was that members of the military community could create artworks that would then be available for sale at different events or an

in-house gallery. The problem was that, according to 501 (c)3 rules, any work created with donated materials or purchased with donated funds would not be eligible for veterans to sell.

The opportunity for service members to present original works for sale was a component of the creative process that I was not willing to lose. Speaking with those I have already worked with, the first time someone offered to pay for their work was a watershed moment, impacting the perception of their own value as a creator. “Someone bought my artwork” is a powerful confidence booster that encourages continued exploration and growth. Losing out on that was simply a compromise I could not make.

As I considered solutions to this problem, I decided to dive further into studies and began work on an MFA. Around this time, through a bit of serendipity, I also had the opportunity to meet an artist who played a major role in my creative interest during those formative years. I grew up admiring and wanting to emulate the oil paintings that adorned the packaging of *Jurassic Park* action figures; there were many attempts with crayon and printer paper to replicate these works. Decades later, I found a painting of my unit done by the same artist, Larry Selman. I reached out to him and was invited to his home and studio in Pennsylvania.

Selman is one of the foremost military painters in the nation, having works commissioned by dozens of military units even including the Pentagon. His large-scale paintings depict both actual and symbolic moments of martial importance. I asked him during our talk why he made the work that he did. He said that he found representational painting of military subject matter was something he felt a personal connection to since his father served as well. However, it also was a means for him to build that connection with the service members he represented in the works. Many of his paintings are signed not only by him as the artist, but by surviving members of the units portrayed.



Figure 5. Larry Selman, *Drop Zone: St. Mere Eglise*, 2008

Art provided a relatable point between Larry and a range of service members from World War II through the Global War on Terror. It was his way of honoring them while giving that connection point to creativity.

It was all connected.

Inspired by this visit, as well as thinking about the levels of creativity that go into a movie like *Jurassic Park*, I began working with digital sculpting, animation, laser cutting, virtual reality, as all of these seemed to hold so much unexplored creative potential. I dabbled with Computer Aided Design in creating a blueprint for a bayonet bearing the creature on the hilt yielding a work that was part sculpture, part engineering. This fusion prompted questions about improving the accessibility of art. Engineering is a common career path and hobby interest of many military personnel, and blending the two could be a stepping stone into the art world. This idea would germinate further in later semesters.

I bring this up to illustrate my own light-bulb moment when I recognized – in form if not in phrase – the interconnectivity of all creative endeavors. It is the foundation of the philosophy I have now as an artist, developed over years of graduate studies. Every process, every medium, every success, and every failure all serve to strengthen and develop creative problem solving. Working on a clay sculpture will increase one's understanding of form and space, thereby also increasing the ability to render them in two-dimensions. Each artistic project builds an understanding of the world. Abstraction, photo-realism, and non-representational art are all manifestations of a perspective of existence. An artwork is the coalesced ideas and experiences, unique to that artwork's maker, presented from their lens on life. I think that's why we are endlessly fascinated by art. It is a window into the human experience as translated by those who strive to express it.

During this time, I also discovered a sense of fun while helping a soldier learn how to 3D print. Because process is such a major component of learning, I wanted it to feature prominently in works directly stemming from these interactions. Using a digital scanner, I captured the soldier as he observed a 3D print. I was able to print this atop a model I built from scratch to emulate the Ender 3 printer we had used. The resulting artwork was strangely recursive: 3D print of a veteran learning to 3D print. While much of my focus is on the heavier issues of the veteran community, and even as I was actively exploring how issues like PTS connected with monster research, this was a much more lighthearted and enjoyable approach.

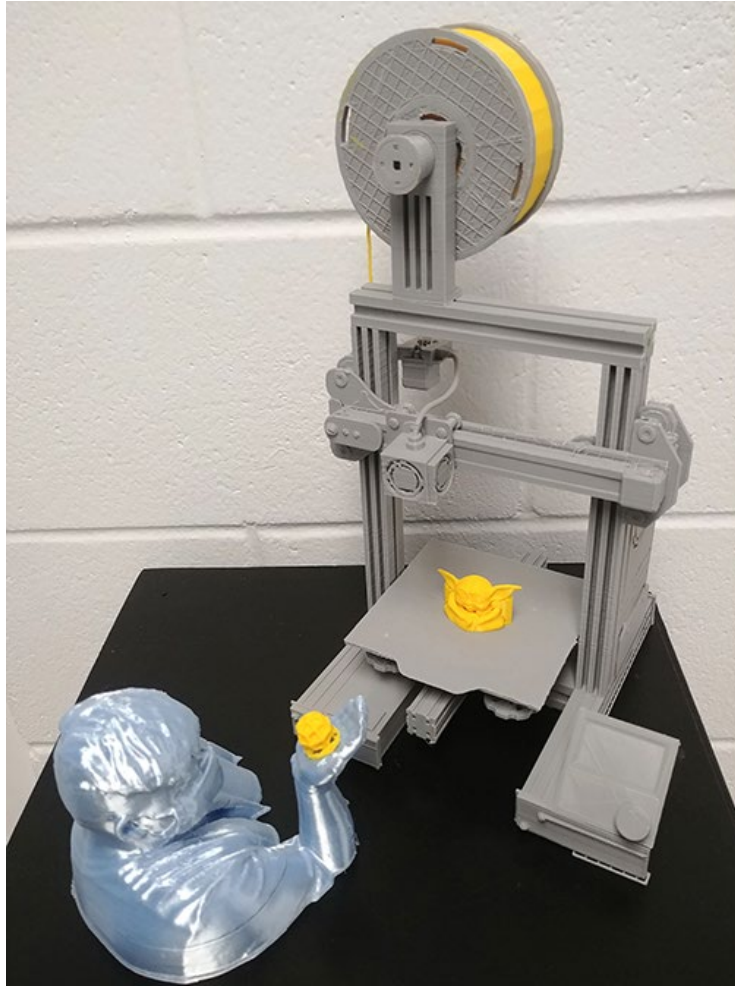


Figure 6. Eric Sanders, *Catharsis II*, 2020

It was at this turning point that I revved up for the 30 Hour Review. The pressure was definitely on. I felt like I was beginning to align the pieces and discover what it was that I wanted to build artistically, but it just was not quite solidified yet. The major hurdle I found myself coming up against was a push-pull dynamic against the work I was making. I was being shepherded away from what I truly wanted to create, and I was trying to fight it too vehemently. Throughout the process, my thoughts went to being more open, to experiment, to go beyond the bounds of comfort into new territories. It was this breakaway that allowed for an intake of more ideas and processes.

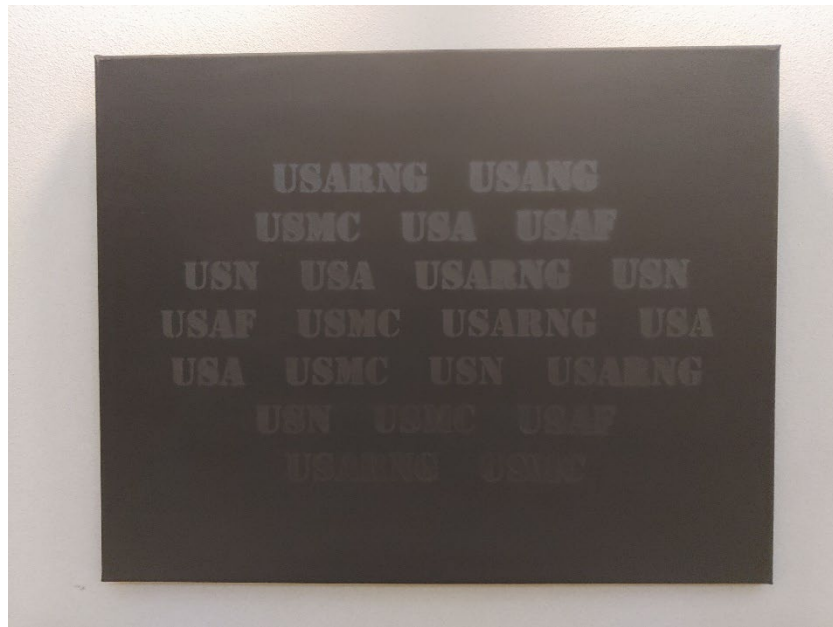


Figure 7. Eric Sanders, *Catharsis IV*, 2020

During the review itself, I found myself questioning whether I was right for this role or not. There was a part of me that was very disheartened and even uncomfortable with the comments being made about how the veterans I was working with “weren’t creating art, just participating in art therapy.” This perspective was one that was a bit surprising to me.

I spent many nights after that review less relieved that I passed and more concerned with where I was going.

I wanted to press forward, to explore the art world and my place in it, but in many ways I felt like my direction had become disingenuous. The work I was making had become a chore with boxes to check and criteria to meet. As I struggled, I tried to figure out why it had become a grind to produce pieces and why I did not derive any sense of satisfaction or fulfillment from them. Quite plainly, I just did not enjoy making things anymore.

This was a difficult but important period creatively, though I have the benefit now of time and space from it to reflect. The frustrations and loss of passion stemming from what seemed like the “you must” and “thou shalt” directives solidified my resolve that I needed to make the artwork that I wanted to make. While the time spent with multiple instructors and mentors, each with different and sometimes mutually exclusive perspectives and ideas allowed a much wider snapshot of artistic possibilities, I discovered in this time that I had the ability to use all that information to forge my own path. It was not about doing what I was told, it was about using all the information and ideas available to make my own direction as strong as I could.

CHAPTER 3

MYTHS, MONSTERS, MUSEUMS, AND MFA STUDIES

My fascination and curiosity led the way to monsters. Creatures from myth and legend, video games, and films like *Star Wars*, *Alien*, and *Jurassic Park* are highly influential from childhood. Strange animals and monsters tapped into a long-standing love for wildlife while also delving into the intrigue of exploring the unknown.

This exploration was informed by listening to the podcast *Lore* in conjunction with reading the trilogy of corresponding books¹, and reading articles from JSTOR about the psychology of fear. Why have monsters always been such a ubiquitous element of human narratives? From *Gilgamesh* to *The Lord of the Rings*, we have associated monsters with the unknown, the frightening, and as manifestations of the worst traits of our own species. Over time, as myths and stories were given visual support through the arts and eventually movies and digital media, increasingly intense realizations of monsters followed.

“*Deep Sea Creature Study Sketches*” explores the first sea monster from historical tales. Cetus was the vengeance of Poseidon made flesh against the hubristic boasting of a human royal family. The monster in the story represented the fear of the unknown and the grand power of forces beyond human control. Most depictions of this creature, particularly early on, looked like a hybridization of whales and large fish, which is understandable consider its origin among seafaring culture. Whales are immense and were almost entirely mysterious to ancient cultures, their benign and gentle natures obscured from sailors. Tales of massive creatures out in the vast

¹ *The World of Lore: Monstrous Creatures*; *The World of Lore: Wicked Mortals*; *The World of Lore: Dreadful Places*

stretches of ocean before maps could define any edges undoubtedly inspired these cautionary tales.

The design of “Cetus” incorporated traits and forms present in extant creatures, in order to emphasize the plausibility of this monster. The notion that perhaps these creatures could indeed exist, just outside the realm of knowledge, was an important factor in all design considerations. The design creates familiarity with unusual features by sketching from some of the strangest and most interesting deep-sea creatures.



Figure 8. Eric Sanders, *Deep Sea Creature Study Sketches*, 2019

The intent from the outset was to create a three-dimensional diorama depicting the emergence of Cetus to devour Andromeda, as penance for her parents’ boasting against Poseidon. The historical context and precedent of monsters was the envisioned theme, which deliberately attempted to emphasize a diversity of silhouettes, features, and implied behaviors to give a wider range of concepts to pull from.

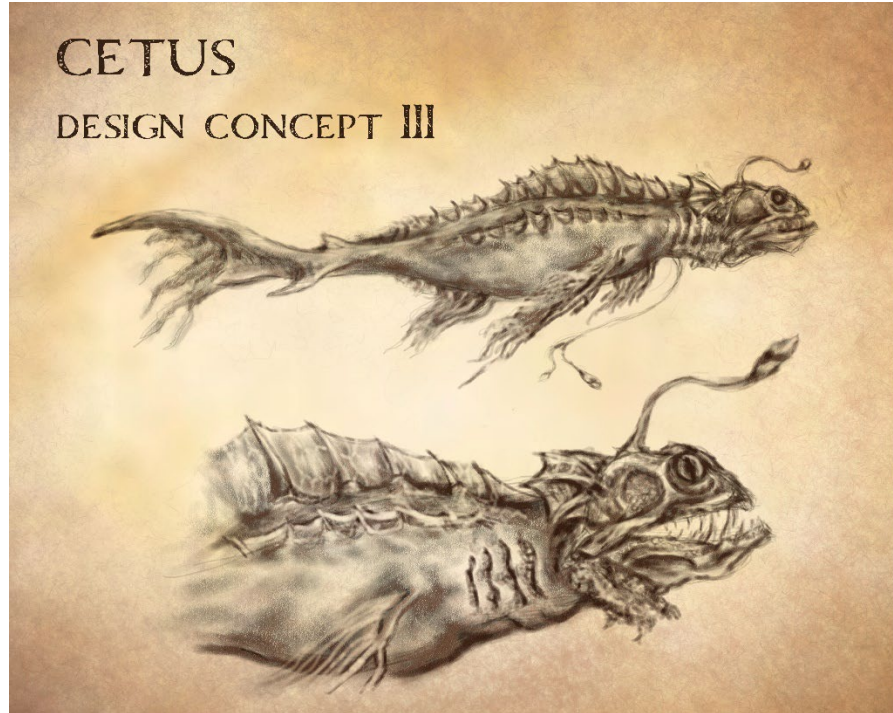


Figure 9. Eric Sanders, *Initial Cetus Design Sketch III*, 2019

From these sketches, I began digitally sculpting the creature in Zbrush. Translating two-dimensional sketches into a “digital 3D” model allowed for more intense scrutiny of the form of the monster. The streamlined body derived from the oarfish, the teeth from the anglerfish, and the head was a hybridization of the scaled head of the viperfish and the extendable jaw of the goblin shark. I integrated these features not just to make a visually unique form, but to create a cohesive single animal that could use these adaptations to survive in the abyss.

In an effort to maximize plausibility of the sea monster, I decided to do some in-person scholarly research, and reached out to the ichthyology department of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C. The effort was a long-shot request to see if one of the scientists would be willing to evaluate the artistic creation’s anatomy and taxonomic

classification as if it had been a genuine animal. The director of vertebrate zoology and the director of exhibitions invited me to D.C. to discuss the project with them in person.

The initial meeting opened with a tour of the museum and in-depth discussions about taxonomy and anatomic subtleties that factor into classification. Dr. Carole Baldwin, director of vertebrate zoology and an ichthyologist agreed with the classification and encouraged continuation with the project, claiming that the Cetus design would function in its described environment. She also offered that she thought it had the appearance of a plausible creature.

The next meeting was with Mr. Mike Lawrence, the director of exhibitions for the National Museum of Natural History. For several hours, he walked through the exhibitions to show how their layouts and supporting materials were planned and incorporated into the museum space for maximum impact. The attention to detail in the curation and presentation was as interesting as the artifacts themselves. I found myself picturing the monsters and related “found artifacts” into a curated museum setting, presenting these creatures as if the evidence has been uncovered in small hints throughout history.

As I grappled with the best way to bring my monsters to life, I began work on the artifact portion of the idea. Shifting the artistic focus slightly, I drew inspiration from the sketches and scientific illustrations of the Renaissance and Age of Enlightenment, when science was present enough to be a force of human understanding but the world was still unknown enough to be full of limitless possibilities. Scientist-artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Ernst Haeckel, Alexander von Humbolt, and Charles Darwin provided a wealth of illustrations to study, but the work of Albertus Seba in *Cabinet of Curiosities* tapped most into the aesthetic I wanted to achieve. His meticulous attention to detail coupled with soft color choices fascinate me. The works were done to be used as scientific reference yet read as artistic illustration.

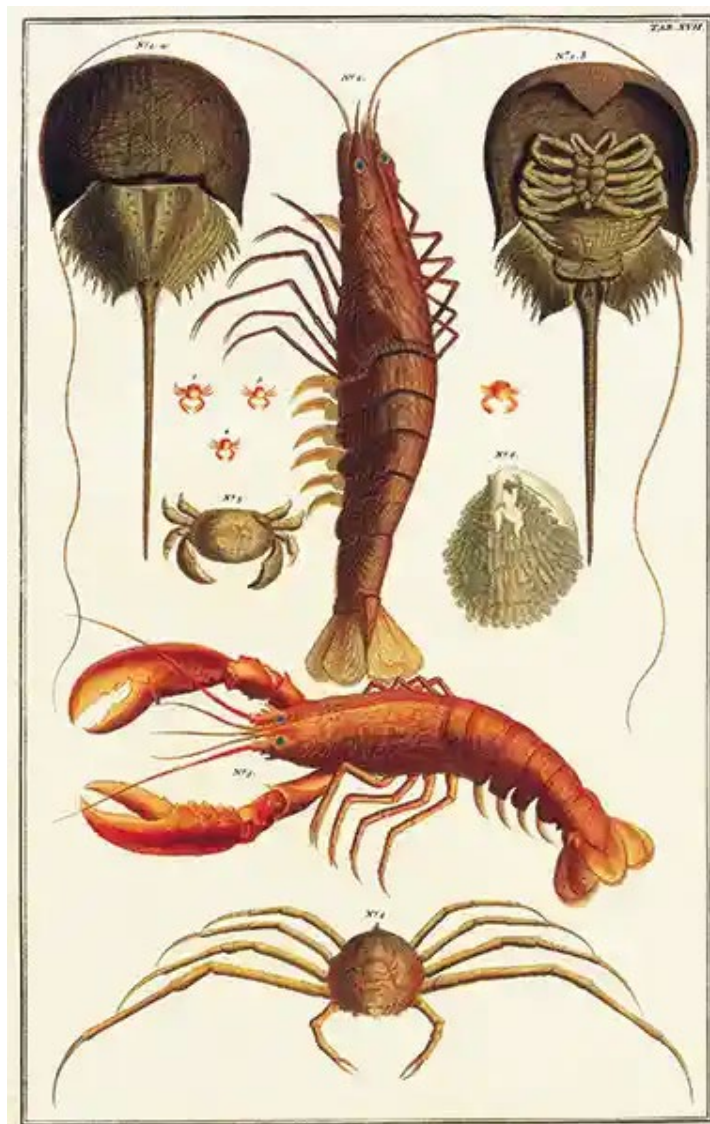


Figure 10. Albertus Seba, Page from *Thesaurus*, circa 1734

It was unavoidable that as I dug deeper into monster lore across cultures, the concept of fear kept appearing. The unknown forces at work beyond our control found explanations in the form of monsters. Ships lost at sea? Kraken or Leviathan. Remains found in the woods of the Pacific Northwest? Wendigo. Miscarriages in the Philippines? The child-stealing specter Manananggal. As the research revealed in multiple ways, our desire to understand, to place the

unknown into the understood, manifested as creatures of myth and legend. Fear lay at the heart of each of them.

However, in our age of technology and scientific understanding, the concept of monsters is almost entirely pushed to fantasy. We love monsters in movies, video games, and stories, but few of us put stock in the idea that werewolves walk among us or that basilisks lay in wait to devour us. The anxieties and fears we once had about the world around us have largely had their mysteries unraveled. We no longer need to assign otherworldly creatures to give form to the intangible, at least, not in a genuine survival context. We now view them as symbols and representations, but not as actual entities.

Despite this, fear is still a very real part of human existence. As I continued to research and consider the nature of fear and of how it is still present in the human experience, even if its explanation through monsters has receded, I had my next breakthrough in artistic progress. This is because the research into fear psychology inevitably overlapped with an issue I was already familiar with – Post-Traumatic Stress. There were commonalities between the creatures that haunted human thoughts and the struggles endured by those afflicted with PTS.

The appearance, the very presence, of monsters in our actual space is considered a non-factor. Except in the darkest or most isolated of spaces, we don't expect to run into any creatures of ancient lore. I wondered how much of our day-to-day experience was built into a routine of expectations. For example, the adage to expect the unexpected is an irony itself, for it has parameters. That is, we generally approach that idea to look for opportunity or understand the unpredictability of tragedy, but these are confined to a preconceived set of parameters. To expect that unexpected does not reflect a belief that we may stumble upon a beast of mythology. Any appearance of a creature thought not to exist would be an intrusive and alarming disruption to

our approved list of “unexpected scenarios.” With this realization of the overlap of interests, I wanted to explore how I could make the monsters as convincing as possible to facilitate that break from preconceived possibilities.

These realizations started forming immediately after the visit to the National Museum of Natural History and as I was working on Cetus and other monsters.

With the designs up alongside images of real animals up for reference, and with approval of those forms from zoologists and ichthyologists, I began digital sculpting for 3D printing. Once printed, I had the ability to manipulate the form of the Cetus sea creature in physical space, to see how it would interact with the environment. The first print was about twelve inches, and while it offered an opportunity to practice molding and casting in silicone, I was not satisfied. What the small creature did prompt, however, was experiment with presentation. Rather than just putting it on display on a pedestal as a sculpture, I nestled it among ice in a cooler as though some angler had caught it and couldn’t make heads or tails of it. The interactivity of that type of display was appealing. While somewhat clumsy and experimental, the piece still received a healthy amount of distrust from viewers. Some people went right up to it, but others kept their distance even though they knew it was just a painted shape of silicone rubber – an interesting example of fear of the unknown even when presented in a known context.



Figure 11. Eric Sanders, Cetus silicone sculpture, 2019

This presentation of monsters evolved as I received feedback and ideas offered by peers and instructors. Gradually, the vision for an exhibition styled like a museum of curated artifacts and specimens became one of harnessing the disruptive potential of lifelike creatures. Combining the reactions to the first Cetus creature with texts I was reading about the relation of the artwork to the viewer, such as Michael Fried's notion of theatricality described in his essay *Art and Objecthood*,² I toyed with the idea of making creatures to leave about in inconspicuous yet discoverable areas just to see how people would react (a concept I have not abandoned). I knew that to do that however, I would need a more convincing sculpture. Rather than 3D print the entire digital asset within the confines of the bed, I sliced the model into chunks that could be

² Michael Fried. "Art and Objecthood." 1967.

assembled into a larger finished product. Thus, the second Cetus sculpture was considerably larger, more detailed, and incorporated more non-traditional elements like resin, snake skin, and taxidermy fish eyes.



Figure 12. Eric Sanders, Cetus silicone sculpture, 2020

The idea that these creatures were disregarded as fictitious until they manifested in front of the viewer—as seen with those unwilling to approach the first Cetus in its cooler, even though they knew it was only silicone rubber—seemed to align with the perception of PTS. For those who are not aware of it, the hardships of Post-Traumatic Stress, particularly when connected to military service, are easy to overlook. However, when the symptoms and consequences appear, they are dramatic and alarming.

For those in the military, the ethos of mental toughness and personal strength lend well to the martial nature of the jobs. These qualities of toughness and strength are even more highly emphasized in the combat arms professions within the military. While this is a positive for the force, it can be detrimental for those individuals who face difficulties associated with PTS. Within the active and veteran communities, there exists a stigma about seeking help or support for mental health. Because of that, many keep their problems contained and hidden, to fester until self-medicating habits like alcoholism, drugs, and bouts of anger take over.

The monster of PTS showcases many parallels to monsters in our world, no longer specters hiding at the edge of science and understanding but a presence in the here-and-now of our high-tech culture. Since we have measured, photographed, and documented so much of our planet, we believe we know nearly all the broad strokes and all that's left are the details. Until we see the monsters with our own eyes, they are easy to overlook. I began to see my own monstrous designs not simply as natural curiosities but as a means for conveying a material presence of abstract mental hardships. Much as monsters of myth seem most plausible when we are isolated in the dark, PTS becomes most potent when alone.

However, art can be a valuable tool to combat these monsters. It is that creative expression, that experience of catharsis, that can drive the actual monsters away. Anecdotally, I've seen that light as veterans who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress create their first drawing or blow up a paint can on their taped-off canvas. That reaction, an opening up even if only briefly, showcased the power of art. It is expressive, yes, but it is so much more than that. It is a beacon of light in our human experience, and that was a route I wanted to explore further.

CHAPTER 4

THE POWER OF ART AND COMMUNITY

We are creatures of habit. It takes very little effort to convince us to stay within our comfort zones. It is the journey outside of the sphere of safety that requires a push of internal determination or external pressures. For me, my zone of creative comfort was in pencil drawing. Graphite and printer paper had been the go-to outlet for my imagination since I started drawing dinosaurs and *Star Wars* characters in 1999. I did not deviate, as I saw no reason to. Creatively, I simply wanted to emulate an artist I admired who worked primarily in graphite. Mark “Crash” McCreery, set the bar of pencil rendering that I wanted to achieve from the outset of my creative exploration.

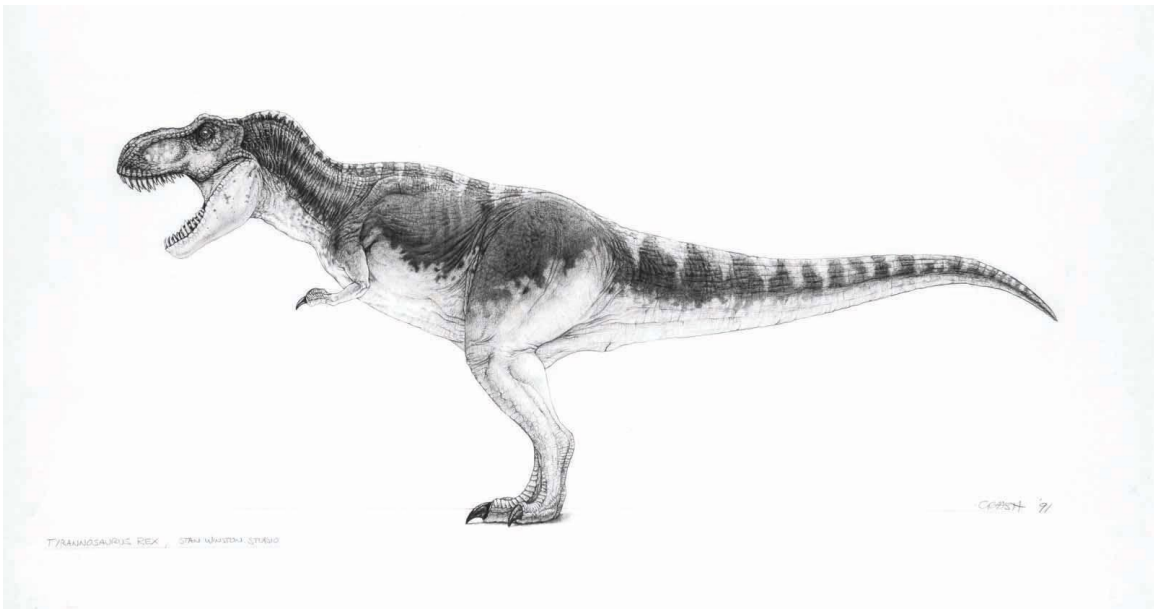


Figure 13. Mark “Crash” McCreery, *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, 1991

Strangely enough, for all the stubbornness to stick with pencil, I was rarely happy with the end results. I was never able to achieve the contrast and values that I envisioned and could see on the page with McCreery's work. In vain attempt to will the rich darks into existence, I would only succeed at distorting the paper with a glossy graphite mess. Had I been less fixated on the specific medium, I could have discovered that charcoal would afford the value range I sought.

It was not until early undergraduate courses that I opened to the idea that maybe there were other creative processes than graphite. I did not jump right into the deep end; rather the exploration of media was more cautious wading. It was, however, incredibly exciting. It felt very much like walking into an atrium that becomes larger and more intricate the longer you take it in. I fell in love with charcoal, had an uneasy flirtation with oil paint, and also realized that sculpture could be fun but not with the cheap hobby store clay I was using. It was also during this period that I discovered the vast opportunities within digital art, mentioned previously. Painting and sculpting digitally allowed a freedom of experimentation (without the corresponding cost of materials) that was not only enjoyable on its own, but which also improved the tangible works.

I bring this up to illustrate my own light-bulb moment when I recognized – in form if not in phrase – the interconnectivity of all creative endeavors. It is the foundation of the philosophy I have now as an artist. Every process, every medium, every success, and every failure all serve to strengthen and develop creative problem solving. Working on a clay sculpture will increase one's understanding of form and space, thereby also increasing the ability to render them in two-dimensions. Each artistic project builds an understanding of the world. Abstraction, photo-realism, and non-representational art are all manifestations of a perspective of existence.

We don't need art. Yet we *need* it. It's a wonderful and perplexing contradiction of our species.

Coming into the graduate program, I already had a solid understanding that I wanted to bring creative opportunities to the veteran community. What I wasn't sure about was how best to do that. Asking veterans to give creativity a chance would be asking them to breach their comfort zones. How could I expect them to go for it if I wasn't prepared to step out of my own familiar sphere? I set out to push myself through techniques and ideas that I had not attempted before. I wanted to experiment with a suite of processes. Maybe some would stick, some wouldn't, but I would at least have enough familiarity to introduce them to those who may have an interest.

The interest in process evolved alongside the overall idea. The first concept drawings in the MFA program were done with a sepia-toned charcoal on gray paper, a small step beyond white paper and standard charcoal, but a step nonetheless. As the actual physicality of the monsters became more interesting to me, my attention shifted from two-dimensional renderings to three-dimensional prints and clay sculptures. When the notion of illusionary reality took over, those clay sculptures became silicone and fleshy. In the span of one semester, I had completed toned charcoal drawings, digital sculptures and 3D prints, oil-based clay sculpture, ink and watercolor illustrations, wood construction, and casting in plaster, silicone, and bronze. These were all new processes and though I was clearly a novice at all of them, they played an important role in broadening my perception of *how* ideas can be realized.

Beyond traditional techniques, I also wanted to embrace the advancements of technology. We too often look at the application of the tech world as it applies to engineering and business, but do not devote enough focus on what the implications are for creativity. When the first Zoetrope was spun and the illusion of moving images came to life, early animations were

considered an art form. It wasn't until the early 1990s that those same creative principles were applied to 3D modeling, a realm previously reserved for industrial engineering. Instead of mock-ups for airplane parts, a team of artists saw radically different potential for the same technology and presented to the world *Toy Story*. These changes are a reflection of the difference in how we relate to technology and, by extension, our relationship with ideas.

These ideas of how we relate to ideas and technology and each other was of great interest. Relational aesthetics, in particular, is an intriguing concept with the work I do and the advocacy I want to pursue. As Nicolas Bourriaud, the originator of the term, describes, in today's contemporary context, "the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale" (13). This idea is a significant departure from the role art often played. While in the contemporary world art still has many of the same functions it has had throughout history, there are certainly artists and movements that are pushing further to be involved. Artists like Donald Judd and Robert Morris have focused on the "wholeness, indivisibility, and simplicity" of the work (Glaser 61), therefore making the viewer much more aware of the space the work exists in. Their pieces were created to be seen as real, whole entities in and of themselves with no attempts at illusion. It was these works that critic Michael Fried, mentioned earlier, described as creating a kind of theatrical space, in which the viewer becomes part of the total space of the artwork – a form of relation (839). As one of the professors noted, in a certain way relational aesthetics is essentially the activation of theatrical space, less through the role of the object than through interactions among the artist whose name is on the label, and others who take part in the same activity or operation.

To see why these ideas are important, remote as they might seem from my work rendering monsters and graphite dinosaurs, consider the artwork of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. As an educator, Rollins brought together middle-and-high-school students to work on murals and other primarily two-dimensional works based on literature.³ Rollins work as the artist, or more accurately part of the art team Rollins+KOS was to act as the facilitator of everyone collaborating to create works which are in museums and collections around the world. With these artworks, it's important to note that the finished product wasn't the only facet of the work; the process and the teamwork involved between the trained artist and the participants who share credit as the artist collaborative group Rollins+KOS is just as vital to the work (Albany 7). Coming across these ideas and artists played a role in reactivating my shelved idea for a non-profit organization, in the revised form of Noble Instinct Artworks.



Figure 14. Tim Rollins, K.O.S., *Amerika VIII*, 1987

The notion of collaboration was immediately appealing to the advocacy aspect of my artistic interests. I believed having a larger established goal could take away some of the initial

³ Kids of Survival: Angela Abreu, Jose Burges, Robert Delgado, George Garces, Richard Lulo, Nelson Montes, Jose Parissi, Carlos Rivera, Annette Rosado, Nelson Richard Savinon.

intimidation creativity prompted in some of the service members. The participants wouldn't necessarily have to be coming up with their own major project but would have room for creative exploration with set parameters. For those who have never done anything like this, it seemed like a good way to initiate without being overwhelming.

The project I developed for this was an animated short titled *Kato and a Vision of Color*. In it, a chameleon named Kato lives in a completely monochromatic world of routine and derives little joy from it all. During one of his lackadaisical forays, he encounters a lightning bug named Chroma whose light colors the world around. Kato is mesmerized by this new notion of color and follows Chroma out into the larger world, developing new perspectives. The antagonist is a spider who strives to devour Chroma, robbing the color from Kato's life. Together, the two overcome the spider's attempts and enter freely into a colorful world.

The process was broken down into tasks for pre-production, production, and post-production with certain people I approached interested in different aspects. We met together over Zoom meetings to discuss narrative flow, visual style, and integrating sound and music. What was exciting personally, however, was seeing people from different backgrounds and creative experience all working together. As an example, two Service Members who worked on concept designs had very different outputs; one has been doing ink-based drawing for years and the other had not attempted a drawing before. It wasn't about the refinement of the end product, it was about providing the opportunity to participate, learn, and contribute to a larger whole.

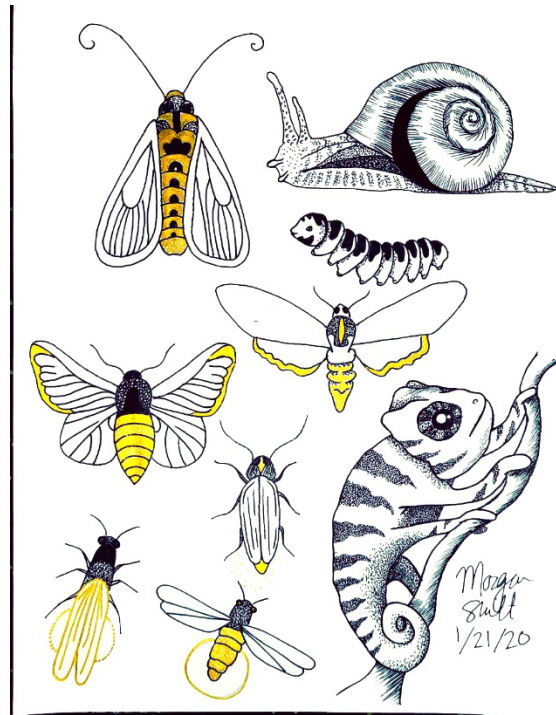


Figure 15. Morgan (U.S. Army), *Kato Concept Sketches*, 2021



Figure 16. Elizabeth (U.S. Air Force), *Kato Concept Sketch*, 2021

CHAPTER 5

NOBLE INSTINCT

The brain is a fascinating organ. I enjoyed wildlife art so much that I developed and had facilitated two independent studies during undergraduate years dedicated to the subject. I sketched animals during my free time simply because it was so enjoyable. It was these interests that fed into the interest drawing and eventually sculpting the monster forms, but eventually came to feel the monsters were a dead end.

With that realization, and inspired in part by some of the artistic and theoretical ideas described in the previous chapter, I built a plan and founded Noble Instinct Artworks. My vision with Noble Instinct was to create a platform from which I could showcase wildlife illustrations, build an apparel brand using a design aesthetic that I personally found appealing, and develop options for veteran-focused creative advocacy and outreach. The entire foundation of the work was making the things that I love with the hope that others would as well.

Despite this, it had not occurred to me that founding and running a wildlife art and apparel company could be an artistic niche in the MFA world. For some reason I compartmentalized the two; MFA work goes over here, Noble Instinct work over there. Following the 30 Hour Review, when I began to really plan for what I wanted to do after graduation, I realized growing Noble Instinct Artworks was the goal.

That lightbulb moment seems now like it should have been obvious, but it took some time and some challenges to finally link it together. As I said, the brain is fascinating.

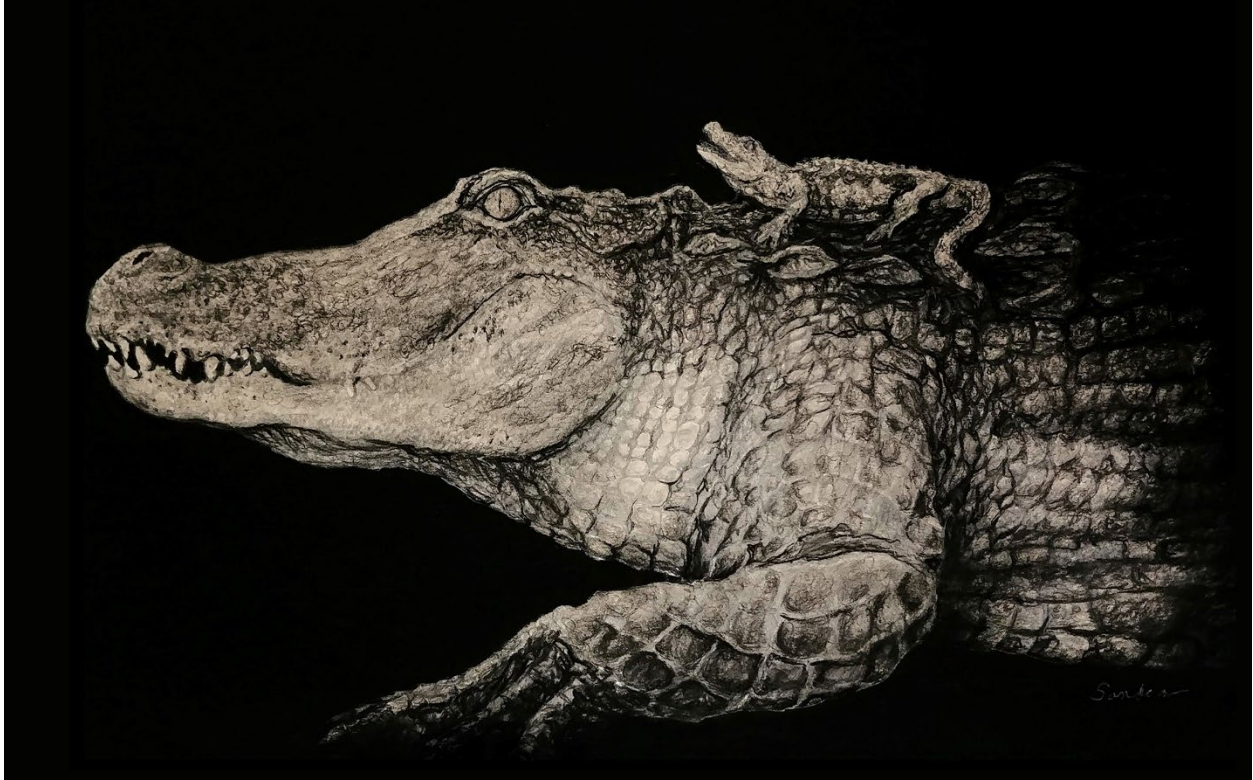


Figure 17. Eric Sanders, *Alligator*, 2019

Shifting focus in MFA coursework back toward a passion for wildlife reinvigorated me. Creating pieces no longer felt draining but invigorating. While before I sometimes found myself stretched in too many directions and becoming uninspired, I now found myself wanting to explore ways to maximize media and develop my style again. It was an injection of enthusiasm I desperately needed to quell the doubts.

As I worked on traditional wildlife drawing art pieces, I deliberately emphasized scale. An extra layer of intrigue was added by focusing on making renderings at the scale of the living counterparts. It was, for lack of better terminology, cool to see the work come together knowing it was the size you could expect to find the animal if you stumbled upon it while out in the world. Very quickly I lost interest in doing anything outside of what I began to call Lifescale.

Working in this way offered a greater appreciation for the diversity of life. It's one thing to cognitively understand that a seven-foot Atlantic blue marlin is larger than a red paper wasp but quite another once you have to manifest those sizes with your own hands.

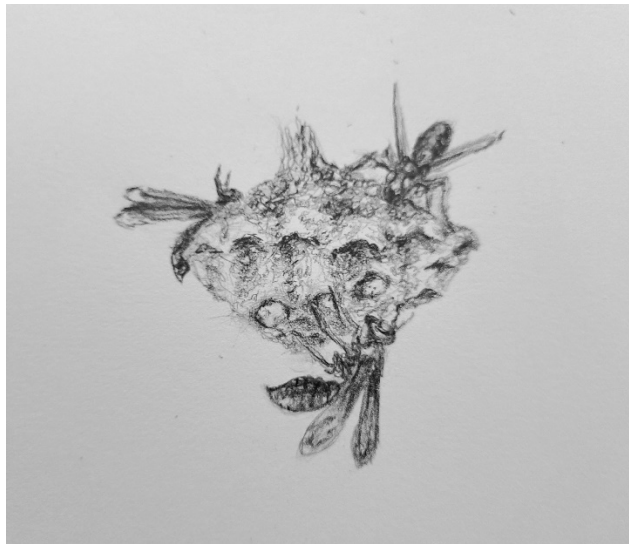


Figure 18. Eric Sanders, *Red Paper Wasp*, 2021

Striving to create compelling illustrations, I looked to multiple reference sources. Images, YouTube videos, documentaries, anything I could to get a better understanding of each species I worked on. Doing this led down a rabbit hole in the best possible way. Beyond rendering and replicating form, I became curious about the whys. Why do alligators have such intense scales?⁴ Why are they called paper wasps?⁵ Why do sharks have freckle-like dots across their rostrums?⁶

⁴ They're bony osteoderms called scutes.

⁵ They chew fibrous wood into pulp and use it to sculpt their nests.

⁶ The dots are ampullae of Lorenzini, electrosensory organs that can detect electric impulses produced by the muscles of fish.

These questions forced greater investment in the subject matter than was found with a still life drawing or landscape. It tuned into the biological aspect, even if only on a cursory amateur level, but it was present nonetheless and became an avenue for further research.

So far, I have found some small successes with Noble Instinct. The drawing of the Dodo was presented the Award of Merit at the juried art show, *Bird is the Word*; the t-shirt designs have so far all sold out multiple times; my latest foray into creating graphic stickers based on drawings have received many compliments and questions about when the next design is coming. My art and apparel are currently being offered in the gift shop of a mid-sized Aquarium as well as contributing to a conservation fundraising auction called Wild Night for Wild Life.



Figure 19. Eric Sanders, *Dodo*, 2020

I feel the confidence in my direction growing with each of these little steps of forward momentum.

I have been told my work, both early MFA and Noble Instinct, follows a trend of convergence. Perhaps that is a manifestation of my own life and my own interests. There is something fascinating about those intersections that are not often seen or acknowledged. In the beginning of the MFA program, the work focused on the intersection of monsters and fear. That interest evolved into monsters and military trauma; and I now find myself within the overlap of military creative opportunity and my passion for wildlife art. I am able to utilize my love for one as a platform for the other.

With Noble Instinct, I am able to pursue the illustrative pieces that offer a sense of joy and fulfillment in their creation. The feeling of disingenuousness is not there anymore. These are the works that provide the creative excitement that I crave.

That element was crucial. It is no understatement to say that without that spark, the creative process might have been extinguished altogether, at least for the time being. However, through wildlife illustration, that spark kindled in a flame for me. It is my love, and it is my passion.

Noble Instinct provides a platform for the illustrations, but with ideas like relational aesthetics and art as social practice, I began to see how it could become much more than just that. One of the primary issues I ran into early after completing the undergraduate degree was how to acquire means and resources to facilitate creative events for service members. Yet another was accessibility. Was there a means through which I could utilize the ideas of adjacent possibilities to help bring people in? What could I do with it?

A potential answer to that question came from Morgan, a soldier I had worked with doing creative activities. I brought up the potential of using some of her artwork as designs for a T-shirt run with Noble Instinct. I thought the idea was a strong one – I am very attached to the idea of other artists contributing to the design work for the company – but she had her reservations. For her, the drawings she did were not “good enough” to go onto objects as the chief design element. It was the same barrier I had run into years ago with ArtistHeart/SoldierBlood and Warrior Art, and I needed a strategy to combat it.

I emphasized my own personal excitement of having a collaborator working towards a design for a shirt and tank top offering. She reluctantly agreed but noted it was more as a favor to than out of a feeling that the design would sell. I am happy to say her fears were unwarranted. Not only was her design popular, but it also immediately elicited more requests for designs by the artist of “Fox Leap.” Her design aesthetic and approach to ink drawings translates well to graphic imagery on apparel.

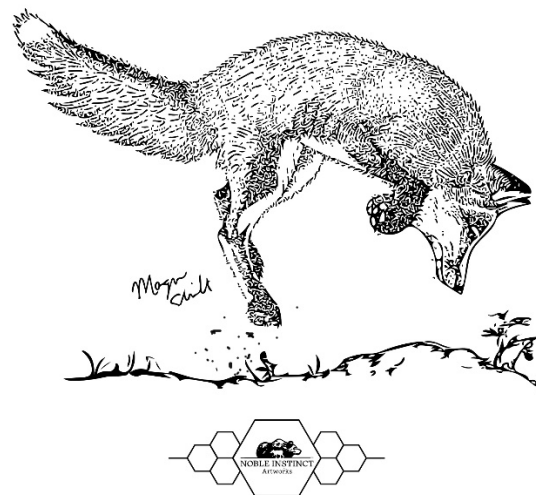


Figure 20. Morgan (U.S. Army), *Fox Leap*, 2021

What this process revealed was that sometimes the encouragement and support is the missing element, not necessarily the access to materials or teaching. Morgan had a strong skill but lacked the confidence to believe in her creative works.

Serendipity is not a term I use often, but there was an instance in 2021 where I fail to see any other words that encapsulate the experience. I received a cold call from a number I didn't recognize. It was a Navy veteran who heard about Noble Instinct through a veteran-owned business Facebook Page (that I was not a part of). Through some string of connections, Noble Instinct was known there and recommended to her because of the creative nature of the work. She was working on putting together a collection of veteran creative works from visual art to poetry done by those who served during the Global War on Terror. Not only was I asked to participate, but I was asked to be one of the three partners helping make this thing happen. The project, titled *Your Call is Very Important to Us*, sought to get word out to as many military communities as possible calling for creative expression of all types and all skill levels. With that project – which is currently on hold as one of the partners is assisting with humanitarian efforts in the wake of the Russian War with Ukraine – we were invited to speak on a number of veteran podcasts to include *Knock and Talk*, *Vertical Momentum*, and *The Stoned Vet USMC*. By existing as a creative business owned by a service member, I was approached and had a wave of connection points made.



Figure 21. *Knock and Talk, Stoned Vet, Vertical Momentum* digital flyer, 2021

There is a potential within Noble Instinct to pursue all my artistic goals, which can essentially boil down into two major categories: fulfillment and advocacy.

The importance of fulfillment is a lesson I learned in this program. When I was not finding that joy and excitement from the creative process, I was not operating at my best nor was I enjoying the path I was on. On the flip side, when I felt I was onto something I was tremendously excited about, I could burn the hours of a day without once feeling like I was doing work. Instead, the creative process was an adventure where I wanted to explore every nook and cranny. The difference between those experiences is profound and personally critical to consider. If I am not making the art that I want to be making, expressing myself the way that I want to express, then what I'm doing is not my art. There is a connectivity of art and the artist that make it a special act.

For me, that intensely special aspect of creating that transcends true articulation comes from illustrating wildlife, whether on paper or for apparel. It is my joy and my satisfaction. It is my way to share myself and passions with others.



Figure 22. Eric Sanders, *Iguana*, 2022

The other important component is advocacy. In this case, Noble Instinct allows time and resources to be put into two causes I care deeply about. The first is that of conservation and stewardship. With how much joy and inspiration the natural world provides for me, I feel a responsibility to give back. Five-per-cent of revenue from everything sold, from shirts to artworks, is donated to conservation efforts. As of this writing, Noble Instinct has been able to contribute to Oceana, the World Wildlife Fund, and Wildlife Education and Rehabilitation of Louisiana with those proceeds.

I am also presented with opportunities for veteran creative advocacy through Noble Instinct that may not have manifested otherwise. The experience with the podcasts and the *Your Call is Important to Us* project highlights the range of potential and relational possibilities

opened up by operating a creative business and continuing to network with the veteran community.

So where am I hoping the path ahead will lead? Ideally, I envision Noble Instinct to function in the same way it is now – fulfillment and advocacy. It is the scale of those core areas that I want to expand. I want to not only create wildlife-based artwork but also to work on for entering major exhibitions. Additionally, I plan to create opportunities for veterans to display their own work sponsored by the company so that their work can take the spotlight. I want to helm a business that actively participates in conservation in addition to providing charitable donations. I want to continue to grow as Noble Instinct provides the platform for the convergence and expression of my passions.

CHAPTER 6
INSTINCT EXHIBITION

It is a surreal moment when suddenly all the work comes together. I have worked on illustrations and designs for Noble Instinct for the past several years now, but it wasn't until the exhibition that I actually saw them all up and together for the first time. It was equal parts exciting and nerve-wracking. There is a confidence and a vulnerability required in presenting that which you pour yourself into for others to take in and judge. This was given an added layer of complexity and apprehension with the major changes and stressors affecting my personal life which corresponded almost perfectly in timing with this exhibition.



Figure 23. *Instinct* Installation Shot 1, 2022

In setting up this exhibition, I looked to maximize the straight-forward element of the hallway. The artwork was measured and set for a midpoint of 58 inches with even spacing determined across each wall segment. Some of the smaller drawings were stacked based on

relation in content – fish with fish, etc. I wanted the presentation to draw the viewer’s attention as they walked down the hallway toward the wall that displayed the exhibition title.



Figure 24. Instinct Installation Shot 2, 2022

The first piece I wanted presented was not only the most recent but one that brought my MFA work full circle. *Kraken* combined a love of monsters with the element of wildlife illustration in a way that was cohesive with other works. It also offered an opportunity to experiment more with the labels and what they could do to enhance the overall finished presentation of the work. In this case, I changed the orientation from landscape to portrait and placed them on the sides of the piece, rather than above and below. I inserted a small blurb about the Kraken and its lore on one side and a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson on the other.



Figure 25. Eric Sanders, *Kraken*, 2022



Figure 26. Eric Sanders, *Kraken* Label Detail 1, 2022



Figure 27. Eric Sanders, *Kraken* Label Detail 2, 2022

Seeing the pieces up together in a single space brought clarity to aspects I could only before guess about. I wondered if the simple dark backgrounds were more preferable to the detailed “full image” illustrations. I wondered if the sizes at different scales would work together in an exhibition. These were elements that I could only speculate on until they were actually presented together and having that opportunity was a wonderful experience. Ultimately, I enjoyed having the diversity of approach and scale. While I enjoy the full image plane usage in the drawing *Blue Crab*, a background with *Iguana* would distract and take away from the colored pencil’s quality on black paper. Likewise, there are some animals it may not be feasible to do in Lifescale unless it’s a major mural, yet I still want to depict them. This diversity offers flexibility and prevents a feeling too locked in. I enjoy the ability to bounce between approaches and learn different lessons from multiple processes.



Figure 28. Eric Sanders, *Blue Crab*, 2022

Once the drawings were up, I realized I wanted to maximize use of the space, even if one wall was painted a different color. The blue wall, in this case, seemed like an ideal spot to present some of the more design-based and commercially available elements to Noble Instinct. I placed two shirts I designed and one designed by Morgan, the soldier who created the fox drawing. Additionally, the hat designs were incorporated among resin keychains depicting a Bluegill graphic I based on a colored pencil drawing of mine.



Figure 29. *Instinct* Installation Shot 3, 2022

This set-up was an exercise in adaptation. Prior to a military-based relocation, the plan was to utilize adjoining galleries to exhibit not only my work but that of others. The layout for the second gallery, which feels important to include here, was a curated selection of veteran artworks across a variety of media and skill levels. The intention was to be a celebration of that expression and of those who found joy in that creativity. Despite that plan not manifesting for this exhibition, it is an idea I will carry forward.

The artist's talk and defense were the culmination and expression of ideas I had been developing for several years. It was a surreal moment to see the exhibition up and tangible after so long existing solely in my head. The different imaginings and permutations had coalesced into something real, and that is one of the most fulfilling moments an artist can experience.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Life is inherently dynamic. With that comes tremendous joy but also intense challenges. Light and darkness can only exist because the other is present. I find that to be true in my life and in my artwork. It is fascinating to see the development of the theme that powered through Dichotomy manifest in larger ways at the culmination of grad school. I am still pulled by the impulses of disparate aspects with a desire to find their convergence.

Looking ahead, I envision a future which can be defined by one word: growth. I am putting together plans and goal-sets to achieve this on all fronts. I am striving for external growth with more offerings in traditional artwork and apparel designs from more artists. I want a broader reach and access to resources to facilitate increasingly ambitious veteran art projects and collaborations. So far, I am finding that interest and initial encouragements as I am repeatedly asked about the next shirt, the next drawing, the next opportunity to go create something. There is a tangible growth to what I'm doing in meeting these goal sets that I've set, and it encourages the pursuit of that dream.

I also want to continue to seek internal growth. Personal resilience and determination are just as important as building skills with a pencil and with paint. I will continue to hone leadership techniques to helm increasingly ambitious undertakings. It is through Noble Instinct that the external and internal growth can be pursued.

I've experimented with many paths in my creative career; I've been pushed and pulled and nearly toppled. Ultimately, with those experiences and that knowledge, my dream to find

that artistic fulfillment and find a platform to give back to the veteran community can only come from following my instinct.

REFERENCES

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Art*. Les Presse du Reel, France, 1998.

Fried, Michael. "Art and Objecthood." 1967.

Glazer, Bruce. "Questions to Stella and Judd." *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*. Edited by Lucy R. Lippard. University of California Press, Berkely, CA, 1968.

Kosuth, Joseph. "Art after Philosophy." *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Essays, 1966 – 1990*. Edited by Gabrielle Guercio. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991.

University of Albany. "Tim Rollins and K.O.S." Collections and Study Space, November 2018 – May 2019.