High-di-High-di-High-di-High, Low-di-Low-di-Low-di-Low

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High-di-High-di-High-di-High, Low-di-Low-di-Low-di-Low

by

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THESIS STATEMENT

E.H. Gombrich’s 1972 essay, *The Visual Image*, states “We are bombarded with pictures from morning till night. Opening our newspaper at breakfast we see photographs of men and women in the news, and raising our eyes from the paper we encounter the picture on the cereal package...Leaving our house, we pass billboards along the road that try to catch our eye and play on our desire to smoke, drink or eat.”

The bombardment described in 1972 is minuscule in comparison with our current visual environment and yet Gombrich already recognized the irrevocable impact that immersion in an “image culture” would have on human psychology.

As an artist, I am a believer in this image culture and its capacity to be liberating, exploratory, and critical. My paintings are a reaction and response to this over saturation. They are influenced by childhood exposure to remedial computer graphics and cartoons, the experiences gleaned from extensive global travel, AND a formative education that fostered an evolving love of art.

David Napier contends that paradox is “an acceptance of things that may look like what they’re not.” Believing in art is believing in paradox. Engaging with art gives the viewer the opportunity to distill and consider these contradictions. The lineage of my work is best traced back to Roy Lichtenstein, from my own personal experience to his engagement of a hidden intellect in Pop Culture, Lichtenstein’s opus is both straightforward and challenging — a reflection of contemporary imagery and a challenge to taste and age-old ideas of what art should be.

These influences can be traced to two of my paintings: *Henry’s Dimensional Dilemma* (2016) and *Mina’s Premonition* (2017).
**Henry’s Dimensional Dilemma (2016)**

*Henry’s Dimensional Dilemma* is an acrylic painting, composed with a collage-like sensibility that allows a degree of fluidity. Some elements are clearly in front of or behind one another, others are deliberately less defined.

The background of the work is a brown parquet floor based on the floor of my first apartment in Prague. Though not essential for the viewer to know, this connection is a means for me to engage with the universal via the personal. I cannot create the works based strictly on universal symbols, I need the imagery to be interpreted through personal experience.

In the foreground is an upside-down rendering of *Archaic Head VI*, a Roy Lichtenstein sculpture in the permanent collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The title references Antiquity, and revisits an historical trope on its own terms. My earliest memory of being moved by an artwork was seeing Lichtenstein’s painting *Grrrrrrrrrr!!* at age 8 and begging for the t-shirt bearing the image. I believe that the interest and sensibility I had then still informs how I function as an artist now. The flattening of the color in the painting does not match Lichtenstein’s original sculpture and acts to enter the work into the terms of digital rendering. The sculpture is also depicted upside down, a strategy that allows it to be encountered first as form and later as representation.

These two elements are positioned in the foreground and background, the rest of the objects are less defined in terms of space, and in relation to each other. A large, mundane houseplant, another nod to the readily accessible via the personal, is the plant
from the lobby of my former therapist’s office. The plant bisects the work, creating a kind of Hall of Mirrors, placing an art historical reference to the right, and a product that displays a face on the left. This product, the Henry vacuum cleaner, is anthropomorphized to capitalize on the universal recognition of faces and its placement in the composition loops back to Pop Art.

Lining top of the painting are four floating spheres, one of which is held by a silhouetted hand, a flat contrast to the simplified three-dimensional rendering of the orbs. This intervention confuses the layering, and introduces an interruption, not foreign to the banal means of access on our smart phones. The formal disruption both breaks the composition and points to the paradox of access.

The images in this painting come from a variety of sources, including my own experiences and memories, to create a sense of shared familiarity.

*Mina’s Premonition (2017)*

*Mina’s Premonition* is a work in the thesis exhibition that has collage-like elements—such as-faux marble tile, references to Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner, with an ambiguous black and hot pink graphic placed to create a sense of visual cacophony.

The “Mina” in the title refers to the dog I recently adopted. The “premonition” is a likeness of her painted before I’d ever met her to which the viewer, through association, ascribes a personal relationship—The background of *Mina’s Premonition* is a tri-color checkered marble, painted as a representation of stone that goes back to the First Style of Roman Wall painting from 200 BC - 80 BC. This long-standing tradition now runs the gamut from luxury homes to YouTube painting tutorials, to rolls of faux marble stickers
in hardware stores. The marble in my own work refers to high and low use functioning both as a painted and conceptual background.

On the left side of the painting, is a framed scene from the “Road Runner” cartoon depicting a landscape painted by Wile E. Coyote of a road split by an enormous chasm in which he falls. Road Runner’s disregard for the danger in the painting is an assertion of his belief in the physical world and his intellectual capacity to move beyond it. The layered and contradictory concepts built into the composition signals both faith in and the criticality of the painting.

On the right is a hot pink poster, a pared down image of a rock I photographed while walking through the Olympic Park in Seoul, South Korea. Though the viewer will not be familiar with the association, it is embedded for my own enjoyment. The rock, is like all rocks while simultaneously being a specific to my experience. The snake, in the painting is less specific. It is a pervasive image in both high and low culture, and casts a wide net in terms of reference. A representation of a snake can be at once biblical and kitsch, or an emoji a paradox that asserts itself based on context.

Giving each pictorial element its own space, the painting collages together a range of images into a single surface, homogenizing them through the uninflected manner of paint application. The “windows” are related only because they exist in the same space (picture frame); they are unrelated because they are self-contained. The frame defines the parameters for each window, whether it is contained entirely inside the screen (picture frame) or not. The painting’s riff on the notion of multi-tasking and computing, is drawn from a liberty that exists only in painting and digitized imaginary.
Contemporary Influences

While art history, both visually and conceptually, is important to my work, I am also influenced by contemporary painters who share similar interests. Laura Owens is an artist who simultaneously employs abstract and representational imagery, serious and silly, smart and cynical. Though all her paintings engage the history of painting, they are also a response to digitization of information via the seduction of the material, and are proposals for addressing the mire of contemporary imagery. Both she and Emily Mae Smith, another artist I am influenced by use art historical narratives to frame contemporary visual culture through computer generated imagery of the mid 1990s to early 2000s. Computer graphics and games and other educational software are now being deployed to access imagery in new ways. Emily Mae Smith merges 90s digital visuals with a painterly language to address the similarities of these two, seemingly disparate modes. There is the confluence of childhood imagery, art and art history in Smith’s painterly works that defies their reproduction on a screen.

Both painting and computer graphics have strong affinities to the visual representation of objects. Though there is always a way to step away from “real life,” we know what a painting of fruit looks like, and that a painting does not have to be made to look painterly to be real. A painting dealing with technological representation creates the possibility of bending and breaking rules and creating things that need not be tied down by cultural expectations around the ideas that it references. It makes sense that a paper addressing my own work should ran the gamut in terms of reference materials, drawing a parallel with the paintings themselves. In Steve Martin’s autobiography, *Born Standing Up*, he recalls Johnny Carson whispering to him that “you’ll use everything you’ve ever
known.” This has remained relevant as I look back on my first encounter with Lichtenstein’s Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr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Henry’s Dimensional Dilemma, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 84 in.
Roy Lichtenstein, *Grrrrrrrrrr!!*, 1965, Oil and Magna on canvas, 65 x 56 1/8 in.
*Mina’s Premonition*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 80 x 98 in.
Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2013, Acrylic, Oil, and Flashe on canvas, 137 1/2 x 120 in.
Emily Mae Smith, *The Riddle*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 67 x 51 in.
INSTALLATION VIEWS