

Slightly Serious

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by

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Authorization to Submit Thesis Statement

This thesis statement of Robert C. Mann, submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Arts with a Major in Art and titled "Slightly Serious" has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate Studies for approval.

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Abstract

My series of drawings and paintings is an exploration of the awkward moments that we often encounter in our adult lives. The figures are a depiction of the psychological reaction of *characters* confronting an awkward situation. In other situations, characters are used as case studies for observational jokes dealing with politics, the art world/art history, and American culture.

Acknowledgements

I would like to give my thanks to the whole of the Art & Design program for providing the benefits, the stress and the encouragement needed during my three years here.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this moment to my parents, sisters, aunts & uncles, the whole damn family, and all of my friends. Everyone has been my constant cheerleaders, giving me support and the drive to make this journey out to Idaho for this wonderful and bizarre time.

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Introduction

“The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.”

–Carl Jung, 1928

Life is awkward and we are often forced to deal with awkwardness in various situations. One example of the awkwardness you may have faced is asking someone out on a date. As you build up your confidence, you imagine multiple scenarios that could occur. You get rejected - they are already in a committed relationship - or perhaps they say ‘yes’ only because they are a serial killer and you are the next victim. It can become ridiculous as you spend more time stewing over the possibilities, however the ridiculousness that is over-analyzing is what I find interesting. How we internalize these various awkward situations is what I visualize in my drawings and paintings. Focusing on social situations and personal relationships, I’ve created a cast of characters designed to be expressive responses to various situations.

Much of my idea of the internalizing comes from artist Maria Lassnig’s concept of *Body Awareness* focusing on the internal states of mind, and Carl Jung’s psychological theory of personas. Both of these concepts share similarities of being aware of an external and internal nature. The external can be described as a social demand that a person is expected to act out while the internal is the inner nature of the individual. Other artists have also followed a similar thought process exploring the interior and exterior aspects of psychology. Many of the German Expressionists often relied on their own expressive nature to create a visual response to what is being felt internally. Edvard Munch’s *the Scream* is a great example of an artist creating a visual response to anxiety. Another example is Otto Dix creating haunting images of his personal experience in the First World War. Dix’s other paintings are also seen as social commentary of the politics occurring in Germany at that moment in time.

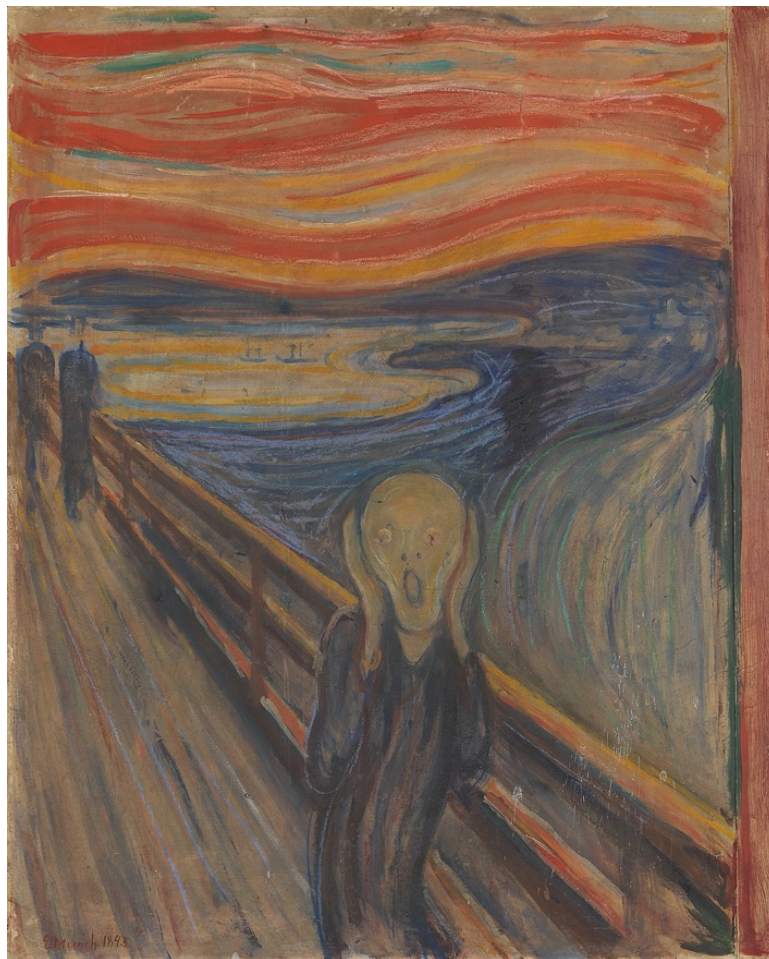


Figure 1.1 *The Scream*, Edvard Munch, 1893

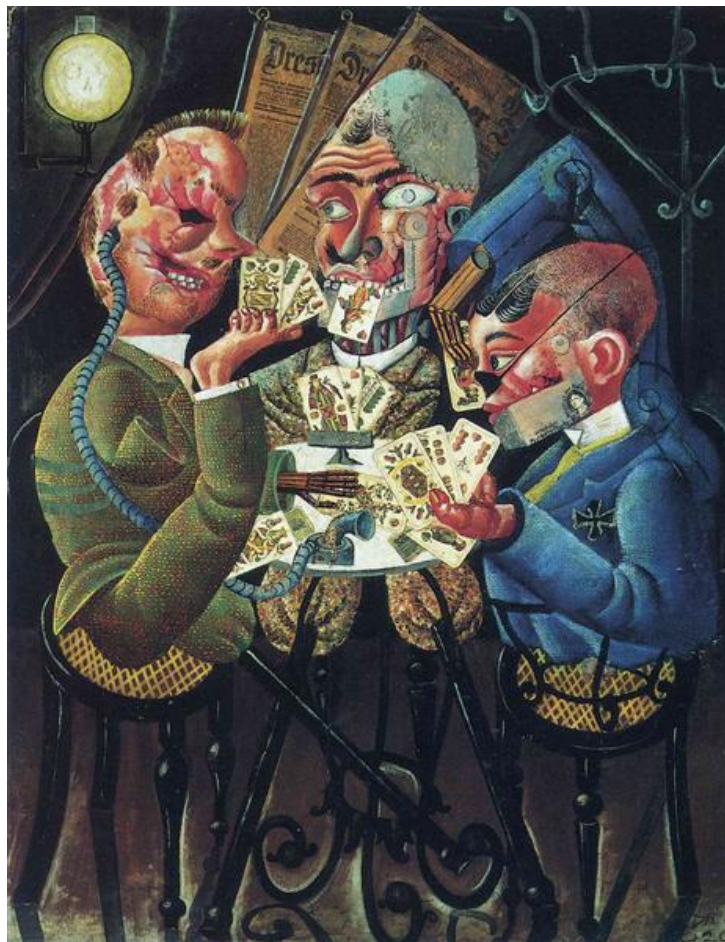


Figure 1.2 *The Skat Players*, Otto Dix, 1920

The Scream is a visually raw painting both in the manner of how the paint is applied as well as the imagery. The colors are not vibrant and feel muted in their intensity. Much of the surface looks dirty with splattered paint, rough mark-making that was applied with a pastel stick and a hectic quality to the brush strokes. There is also a consistency with a curving movement both in the sky, the water and bay, then finally to the screaming figure. The only thing that feels out of place is the rigid bridge and the couple in the background. Munch is establishing a disconnection with the screaming form and those in the far end of the bridge, our central focus is on the isolation of the screaming person.

The Skat Players showcases Dix's sardonic humor and provides a message along with it. We are introduced to a table of grotesquely mangled men playing a game of cards. The manner of how these men are seated, holding their cards and, in general, their appearance shows the characters attempt at being "normal". The humor of the piece is the manner of how these figures try to carry out a card game even though some lack limbs and are forced to hold

cards in their mouths or foot. The overall manner in how Dix created this painting is cartoonish, choosing to create an absurd prosthetics. This absurdity of the characters can be seen as Dix's reaction to the treatment of the defeated German armies. These soldiers attempt to piece together a former life they once had, much as they try to piece themselves back together. Many of the German troops who were greatly injured or suffered PTSD (or in that time, *shell shock*) were not able to find employment. Worse still these soldiers felt the social stigma from their own countrymen who saw their mutilated bodies as reminder of Germany's defeat. It's also important to note that Dix has created a connection with his own history as soldier in WWI to these card players in the painting. If you look closely, the figure in the far right corner has a self-portrait of the artist on his prosthetic jaw. Another thing to note about this character is the Iron Cross medal which Dix was also awarded during his service in the war. The artist is establishing a connection to his own history in WWI and sympathizing with these characters.

Both of these paintings—while different in the use of paints—still achieve a common visual expression of how these artists felt during their time. One element shared by both images is the use of distorted bodies. The twisted forms help elevate the feelings of anxiety such as the elongated screaming maw of the Munch's figure to the absurdity and humorous attempt at normality for Dix's card players. Both artists also choose to paint in a manner that is not terrible realistic but, instead, paint primarily through the use of imagination. The artists have chosen to focus instead on the internal, creating a visualization of the invisible force of emotions.

My own work also focuses on my internal reactions based on the various situations life throws into my path. These anxieties of being an adult, of being human, are reflected in the multitude of characters in my paintings and drawings. To further explain my methodology and to shoestring together the overarching themes of my work, I will address the psychology of personality and how we react to specific situations. More specifically, I describe how my personality reacts to certain situations. To me, there is a connection between people: we all go through all these awkward moments. The awkward moments actually frame you as a person. They make who you are. The drawings and paintings are a way of making explicit the personality and psychological make-up of everyone.

I will be further exploring the overarching themes that are mentioned above while examining the elements of the body and how they are being used in my paintings and drawings. I will describe the work of other artists who have influenced my work and also

share similar ideas to myself. If you are still reading, I would like you to consider this paper less of a research essay and more of a journal into my practice.

Body as Language

I often focus on are the hands, face, and the body, in general in my artwork. Both the hands and face are great elements of expression. Anyone can read into facial expressions then understand and connect with another individual on an emotional level. Like watching a movie and the actor begins to cry or laugh, the audience react in similar manner. Hands are also an extension of that facial/internal expression. In the portrait *Blue Guy* the character is cradling his head in their hands. While the character's emotion does not appear on their face, the hands help support what this figure is feeling. This character is looking out their window in a state of melancholy. While the emotion is not apparent at first glance, the body language that is communicated through the hands give a hint to the character's inner emotion.



Figure 2.1 *Blue Guy*, 2018, Robbie Mann

I prefer to use the human body as a form of communicating expressive emotions. From twisted visceral faces in my series of *Men in Power* portraits or other work like *The Idiot* and *The Moron*, portraits become a way create honest and complex character studies. In these images, I flesh out various details of the portrait such as teeth, a lazy eye or a very peculiar nose. Other elements that occur in these portraits are facial expressions. The use of specific expressions adds another element of who this character is. For example, *The Idiot* is a portrait that embodies the idea of what an idiot looks like. This is not a specific idiot but, a generalization. But certain details come through to personify the idea of an idiot such as the slightly open mouth and the offset gaze the figure has.

Another prominent element is the use of vibrant colors. Colors themselves have a psychological attribution and are often linked to a certain emotion. For example the color blue is associated with sadness while red is associated love. However, while some may agree that red can symbolize love, red can also symbolize angry. Color for me help to establish a set emotion for certain characters, even if the emotion of the color is read differently by the viewer. I also like to use color as a way to establish the personality of a character. Finally my use of a vibrant color palette in in opposition with the grotesque forms. I like to consider this a push-pull effect. The colors choices are intense and draw the audience to look closer while the figures are malformed and push the audience back.

Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung describe the persona as: “the individual’s system of adaptation to, or the manner he assumes in dealing with, the world. Every calling of profession, for example, has its own characteristic persona. It is easy to study these things nowadays, when the photographs of public personalities so frequently appear in the press. A certain kind of behavior is forced on them by the world, and professional people endeavor to come up to these expectations. Only, the danger is that they become identical with their personas- the professor with his textbook, the tenor with his voice. Then the damage is done; henceforth he lives exclusively against the background of his own biography....One could say, with a little exaggeration, that the persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is (Jung & Read, 1990, p. 123).”

The use of the portrait in my work can be connected to the theory of the *persona* by Carl Jung. To summarize, the *persona* is like a mask linked to a role we play in life. What this mask can look like will depends on the character we are portraying. For example, a job

position can become a *persona* and others can see one as the specific character. We may also carry multiple *personas* so one can be CEO at work and become a husband or a father at home. The problem of course is being engrossed with this persona and believing that this is your true personality.

Artist George Condo uses this idea of the *persona* when creating his paintings. In Condo's painting, *The Cracked Cardinal*, we see a visual representation of a cardinal. We know that the figure is a cardinal based on the regalia he is wearing. However, the face has been abstracted, giving the appearance of a cubist landscape mixed with a cartoon dog. Details in the painting are rendered to be visually realistic but, the face is what stands out. This is visualizing of the internal psychology of this character, the cracked cardinal. Condo's other portrait paintings explore the use of the persona, focusing on the mental state of his character while titling these characters with the role they are portraying. While his work has influenced my paintings, I believe my paintings capture the true visual appearance of the internal emotional state of the character psychology.



Figure 2.2 *The Cracked Cardinal*, 2001, George Condo



Figure 2.3 *The Idiot*, 2018, Robbie Mann



Figure 2.4 *The Moron*, 2018, Robbie Mann

Of course, the limitation with working in a portrait is the focus is only on the face. However, the use of the whole body can elevate the idea of the character's inner turmoil. The use of body language can be a tool that translates specific emotional responses that audiences can read into along with abstracted body. Even in my own work as I twist, bend and contort the body in cartoonish manners others can relate to the characters and experience of that body with their own. In some of my paintings and drawings the figure is often confined within the edges of the picture plane. This is similar to the *glass cases* of Francis Bacon's artwork in which his figures are confined in an eternal scream.

Both Bacon and I work in a spontaneous moment when approaching a painting. We are both responding to an emotion and trying to visualize the internal. In the example below you can see that Bacon's brush strokes are raw, messy and visceral. Canvas is exposed, and the paint captures the texture of the canvas surface. At most, there is one or two layers of paint on the whole surface and the only things that stand out are the lines that form the glass case and the mouth. Both Bacon and I appreciate the surface quality of the canvas but, I like to push the surface texture in my work, to create a texture that is closer to skin, gooey and juicy, and organic. Another thing that we both focus on is the mouth. Bacon once commented on trying to capture all of the various colors in the mouth. I always think about his comment of his and try to cram as much detail in the mouth of my own figures. The mouth is a very powerful visual tool. It's a source of intake for nutrition as well as communication muscle. It's also a source of emotional actions such as screaming.

The other element of Bacon's work is the use of the glass cases. Whether Bacon intended for this box around his figure to be a representation of emotional entrapment, I use a similar idea of the entrapment. Rather than confining my characters in a space within the picture plane, I use the whole of the picture plane to squeeze the figure in. My reasoning is that it forces the body to conform to the space. Imagine yourself crouched over, your knees touching your earlobes and your head is pressed against the top of the frame. It's a restricted feeling with limitation to movement and this generates that connection to the audience. Seeing the distortion the body is going through to fit in a cramped space creates that uncomfortable connection of the body from the figure to the viewer.



Figure 2.5 *Head VI*, 1949, Francis Bacon



Figure 2.6 *Bashful Nude*, 2019, Robbie Mann



Figure 2.7 *Red Guy*, 2018, Robbie Mann

There is even a *body language* that we use to associate some kind of meaning to every way we position the body. Such as crossing the arms and legs may mean someone is closing themselves up, or maybe they are trying to compact themselves into a small and tight form in order to disappear into the cushions on a couch. The ultimate goal for all of my artwork is for the audience to be connected with the figure. The use of the body becomes a tool of sharing and expressing specific emotions that audiences can relate to. The audience can find moments in which they too relate to the struggle of a character in an emotional situation. This belief that the body is a tool of communication stems from the ideas of *Body*

Awareness that was first started by Maria Lassnig. Much of her work explores the relationship of her body and how it is reacting to various situations.

Much of Lassnig's work focuses on her own body and the experience she is feeling. The idea of Body Awareness can be related to the ideas of the expressionism, creating visually imagery based on the internal emotion one is feeling. In the first example below, *You or Me*, the viewer is confronted with a nude self portrait of Lassnig herself. Her application of paint is spontaneous and messy leaving brush strokes visible to the viewer. Much of the negative space around the figure is primed canvas. This is a similar trait that can be seen in the work of Francis Bacon. The difference between is that Lassnig uses a vibrant palette of colors. Another significant difference is the allowance of humor that Lassnig places into her work. The central focus of *You or Me* is Lassnig herself. She is confronting the viewer with a gun pointing directly at the viewer along with her wild eye stare. Lassnig is also holding a gun to her temple. I read the visual as an idea of confronting the gaze of your viewer and maybe specifically the male gaze.

Lassnig incorporated the ideas of feminism into her paintings with moments like *You or Me* and its confrontation with the gaze. In other examples, Lassnig is using the body as a tool of communication. In *Mann – Frau*, Lassnig is creating a grotesquely human form. I read this as being human because of the flesh like colors that are used. The figure also appears to have legs and a deformed arm of some kind. Its major feature though is that its head looks very similar to a penis. The placement of the penis as the head of this figure and the title of the painting indicates that men do think with their dicks. Again, Lassnig is incorporating her humor into this piece.



Figure 2.8 *You or Me*, 2005, Maria Lassnig

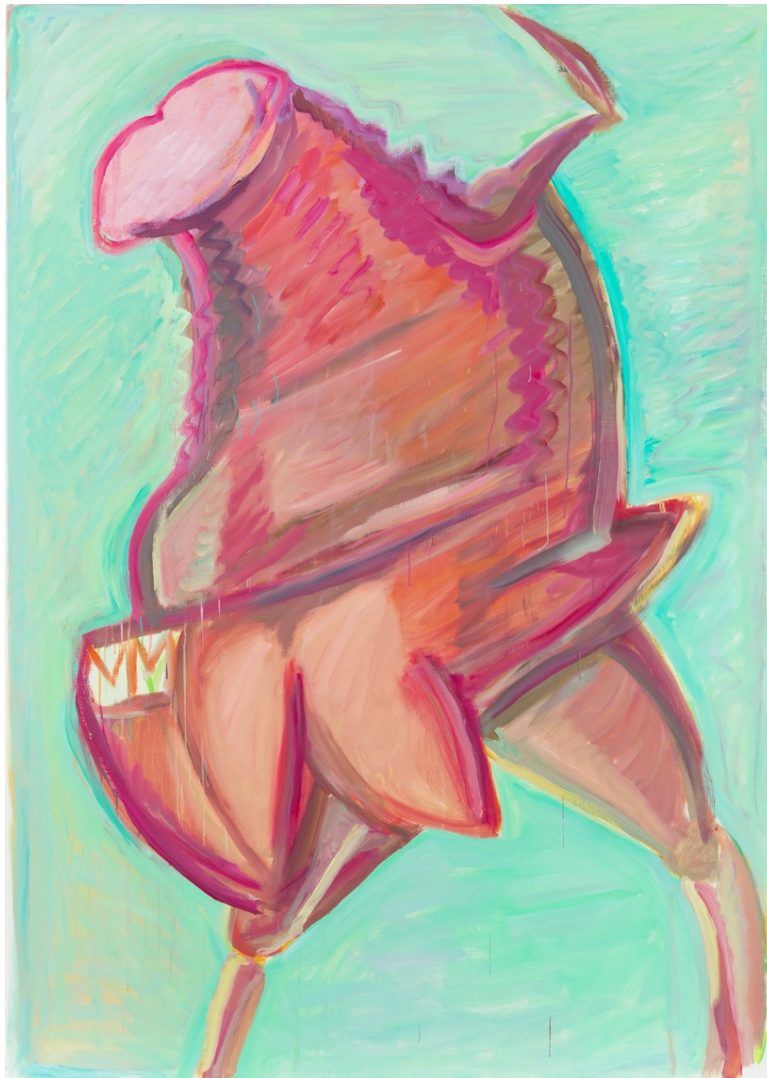


Figure 2.9 *Mann - Frau*, 1993-97, Maria Lassnig

Audience reaction to how I have manipulated the human form in such grotesque manners is interesting. Much like watching a car wreck happen before you, you just can't help but watch it. I think that level of curiosity happens as the audience takes in the overall appearance of the body before them.

The goal for my work is to establish a connection with the audience no matter how uncomfortable or repulsed they may feel. I think it can be said that any artist's goal is for that a connection to be between the viewer and the work. My method of building this connection is through the use of a common body language. We each have our own bodies and are able to relate to one another based on shared experiences. For example, stubbing my big toe on the

leg of a table is an awful experience. This is also a shared experience many of us can relate to. I can't count the number of times that I have stubbed my toe but, I know of the experience. This is relatable experience and we know the exact feeling of how we experience the moment of stubbing our toe will vary. But it is a mutual agreement that stubbing your toe is not a pleasant experience.

It is also fun to create fictional experiences as well. *The Armpit Plucker* is such an experience that I have not had, however, I have pulled out hair on my body before. I sure many of us have plucked a hair off of our body in some point in time. This work describes the moments of the awkward tendencies that many of us perform. Plucking the hair from your armpit is about as taboo as starching your armpit or sniffing it. Even picking your nose in public is deemed unacceptable but this is still something many of us do. The absurdity of what we are and are not allowed to do with our bodies or even our collective beauty standards, makes owning a body an awkward experience

There are specific experiences that have become the crux of my work. These are the things that keeps me up at night and cause me to worry. These moments define the subject matter of my work into two categories with each, pertaining to the use of body as that tool of communication. The body becomes a tool in sharing and relating to experiences. Experiences can be a moment when an individual is experiencing a frame of time with their own body (resting and reflecting). This experience can be altered if the body is interacting with a social event: Do you know anyone there? What type of event is this? Is it mandatory or based on your own choosing to attend this activity? A number of factors begin to set in and can vary depending on the situation of the narrative in each work. The nature of the body itself is an awkward thing. The factor of these situations we may experience can ultimately be categorized into two themes ideas. These categorizes I define as experiences that are personal and experiences that are a collective.

To further explain this, the personal experience would be how the individual and their body is reacting to a giving situation. Often work that I create in this mind set is a reflection of my own personal experiences and how I am reacting. This is what I call Body as Angst, a reflection of the self-versus the awkward situation. Then there is the collective experience that is shared among others. This is not like the idea of a relatable experience like stubbing your toe. This is an experience that occurs on a larger scale and can affect everyone. One example of this would be a beloved television icon that is cherished by multiple people during their childhood. You may continue to praise this icon even into your adult years and

mourn for this icon in their passing. However, let say some scandalous information comes out about this person, like they are a sexual predator. The collective consensus will turn the positive opinion into a negative one. This is what I define as Body as Politics, a collective experience that is shared among everyone.



Figure 2.10 *How it Feels to Stub Your Toe*, 2018, Robbie Mann



Figure 2.11 *The Armpit Plucker*, 2019, Robbie Mann

Body as Angst

In some of my works, I would describe the body as an indicator of angst. The cause of this angst often varies, but the main source is simply the human condition. Body of angst is not so much about trying to create what that specific source of the angst but rather the specific emotional response to that angst. For example, my painting called *Stress-ball* stemmed from the idea of my first year in grad school. Having to juggle both a new job as a graduate student as well as a being a student instructor filled me with a type of angst.



Figure 3.1 *Stress-ball*, 2018, Robbie Mann

The earliest rendition of this angst started in a series of cards I dubbed the *Rough Cut Cards*. I began working on these cards in the late 2016 through 2017, during a period of my life when I was working full time in customer service at a hardware store. You generally meet some wonderful people along with the absolute worst of the worst working this type of job. Not only had my focus shifted away from art but I was dealing with national political events: the election of Donald Trump and the shooting at the Pulse Nightclub. I guess I consider this a moment of becoming “woke” and realizing that *hate* is still an ever-present issue in this country. I was also dealing with a lot of uncertainty: Where was I going in my career? What am I trying to say with my art? Will I ever move out of my parent’s house?!

This was a stressful period in my life and my art making was slowing down. So, the solution of this matter was *the Rough Cut Cards*. This was just an avenue for me to eject those feelings that had built up from what I was reading and hearing. It was a great therapeutic moment in my art making. I could just react to what I was feeling and create something. It helped me explore the use of line quality and allow my sardonic humor to shine through. This also helped me explore new visual ideas such as using the edges of the picture plane as a way to entrap some figures and the abstracting of the face and body.

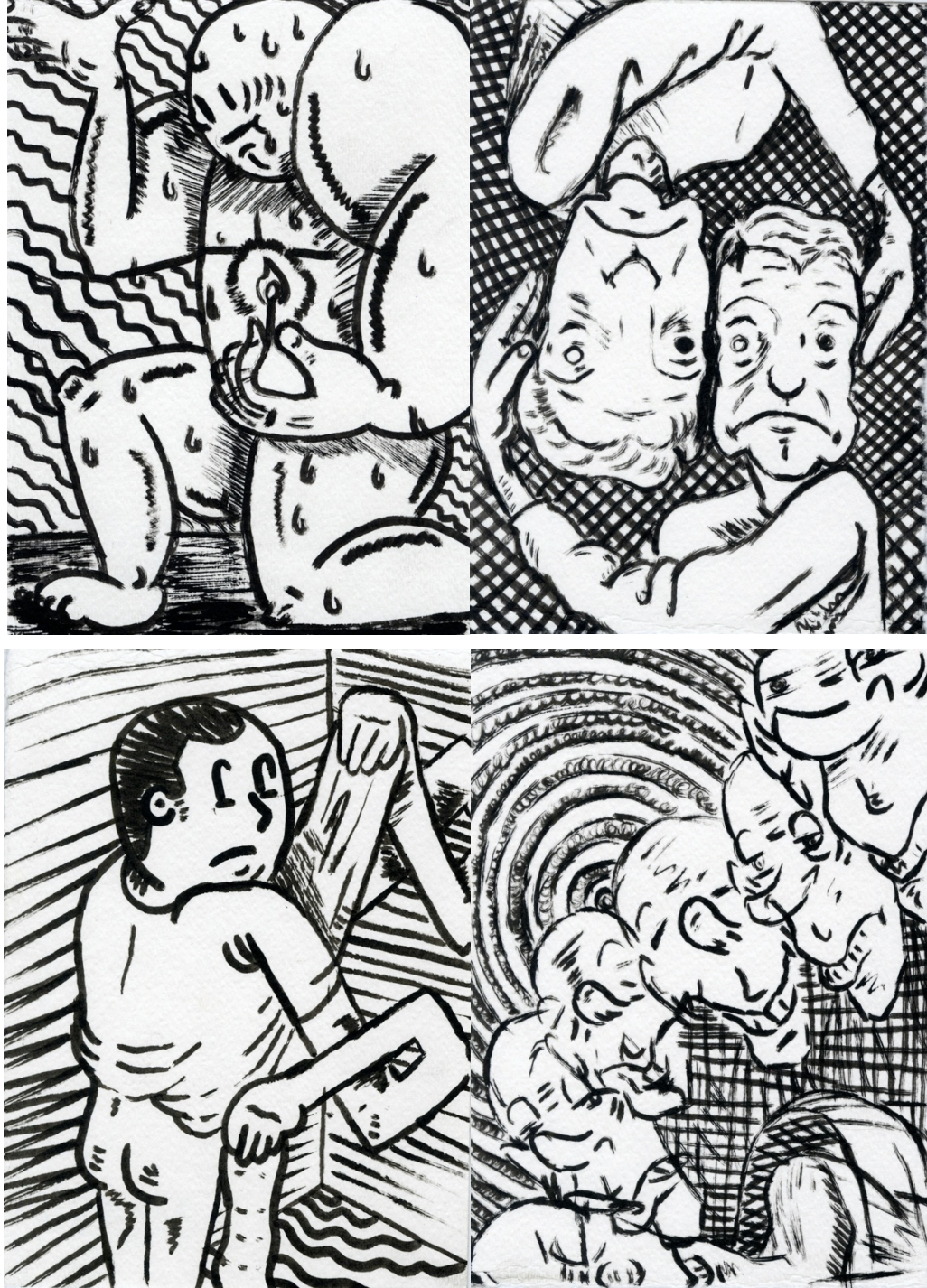


Figure 3.2 *The Rough Cut Cards*, 2016-2017, Robbie Mann

At some point, I decided that I should use the same paint marker I was using in the *Rough Cut Cards* on canvas. These small canvas paintings were much more spontaneous and better reflected more of the angst I was experiencing at that time. I would later dub this series of work as the *Cannibal Parade*. While I was working on this series I was greatly inspired by the underground comix artist R. Crumb.

I would compare the content of *Cannibal Parade* to the thought process of comic book artist Robert Crumb. In a video interview called *A Compulsion to Reveal*, Crumb discusses his work as a way for him to communicate what he was feeling and thinking about. He notes having been influenced by comic book artists that were personal in their artistic expression such as Harvey Kurtzman and Jules Feiffer. I never produced work as perverted as Crumb's comics but, I appreciated the use of his observation and reaction to what he was personally feeling and thinking.

Much of *Body as Angst* follows that notion of reacting to what is being felt. This would be the self versus whatever the situation is. At this point, I want to bring back some of the central ideas of interest I have mentioned early: the *persona* and Body Awareness. Much of the *persona* is based on the what is on the outside and what role am I acting out. However, this outside role is not the true personality but, what is occurring on the inside. This is where I shift my focus, rather than rendering the outward appearance of the human form and how someone wants to be presented, I look to the inner nature. Body Awareness is also in the vein of that thought process, looking at the internal and visualizing it. Using the body as the mediator for expressing the emotional state that is felt.



Figure 3.3 *Cannibal Parade* (detail images), 2018, Robbie Mann

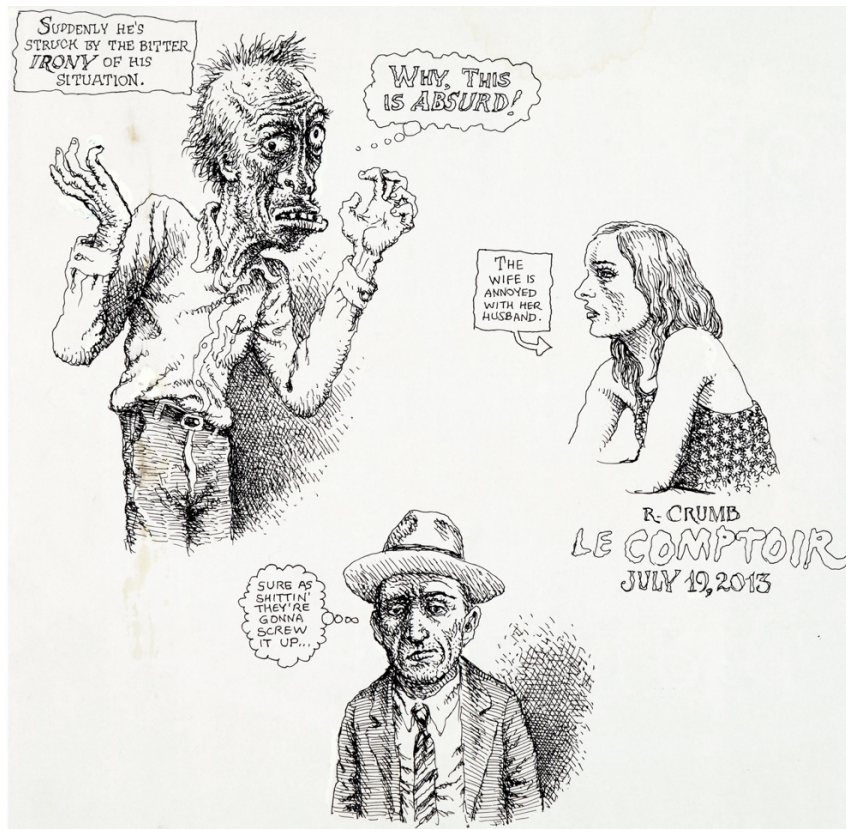
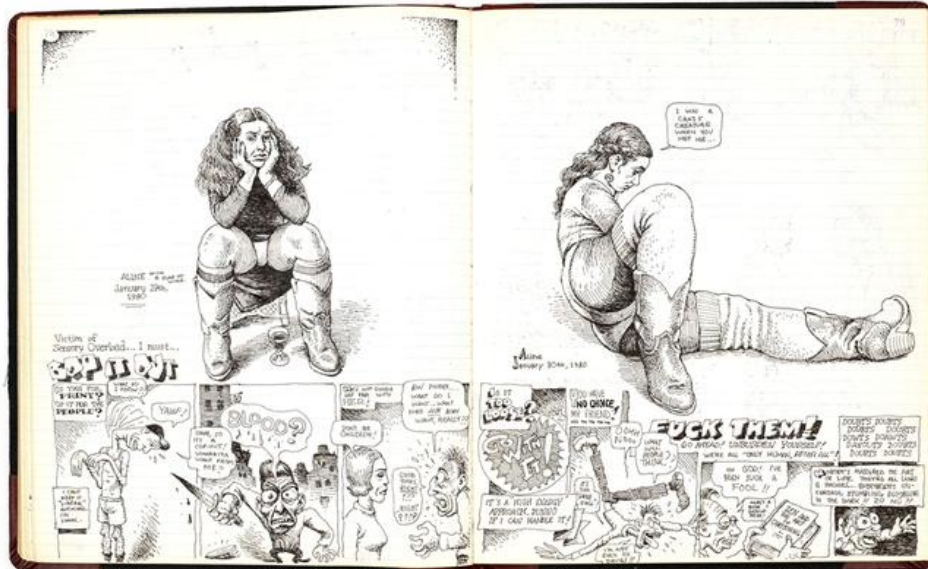


Figure 3.4 Robert Crumb

There is another piece—*If You're Uncomfortable, I'm Uncomfortable*—that helped inspire a series of installations that I have been working over the past two years. I will describe this painting further in the next section, of *Body as Politics*. This newest series of installations work takes many of individual paintings and drawings and forces them together in a single space. The idea for this installation is the thought of enter a crowded space, such as a grocery store or crowded restaurant or bar. It's the feeling of being overwhelmed with a gathering of bodies. It reflects that moment when you start to over-analyze the situation: Don't stare at that person or why are they staring at me? Do I recognize anyone here, is that my ex over there?! Dear God, I need to get out of here quick! The bombardment of emotions and thoughts drives that paranoid anxiety which leads to the angst that is felt when entering a crowded space.

This series of various installations is called the *Crowded Room*. Each installation becomes a challenge in working with a new space. How do you install the work? Where do you place each character in the gallery space? Is there a corner that I want to use or other elements in the space to capture an awkward feeling in the installation? The challenges that are confronted in installing in a new location can be frustrating but, a rewarding problem with fun results. Another artists, Nicole Eisenman that has great inspired my own work and follows the use Body Awareness also happens to install work in a similar fashion. Much of Eisenman's work focuses on situations that are both personal for her was well as the collective thought. Understanding one's own body and the way the body is responded as well as the shared experience that each of us understand because we all have a body.

Much of the angst that is experienced in the work of *Body as Angst* is dealing with personal matters and reacting to it. But what is that angst? Where is the source of *my* angst coming from? Its people. I find people to be weird and frightening too. Much of the anxiety I'm feeling is a reaction to what people are doing or saying. This angst towards people and the collective of humanity is where *Body as Politics* comes in.



Figure 3.5 *The Crowded Room (1st rendition)*, 2019, Robbie Mann



Figure 3.6 *The Crowded Room (2nd Rendition)*, 2019, Robbie Mann



Figure 3.7 Nicole Eisenman, *Cloud*, installation from retrospective show *Dear Nemesis: 1993-2013*, 2014

Body as Politics

I see Body as Politics as way for me to critique American culture and current events. Artists like George Grosz often made artwork critiquing the German government during his time. Post-World War I Germany was facing collective feelings of absolute defeat and with the financial strains the country was having to pay. This must have been an incredibly overwhelming time for the German people, and this is evident in Grosz's paintings. In the first example of Grosz's painting, *The Funeral*, the viewer is presented with a chaotic funeral procession. The streets are littered with grotesque figures huddled together in the street in a modern city. The procession is less of a sorrowful gathering but a wild party. Even the corpse of the dead is taking a moment to drink for their own funeral. I consider this painting as Grosz angst towards humanity and the people he was seeing.

The next piece by Grosz, *the Pillars of Society*, focuses on the angst of the people in institutional roles. The painting depicts figures in various positions of power such as politicians and businessmen, a member of the clergy and generals. All of the figures are grotesque and there is even a figure who is depicted with literal shit for brains. I would separate these two paintings to follow the categories of body I have established. *The Funeral* would fall under the thought of Body as Angst as the angst Grosz is feeling is personal and is based on how he is reacting to the people in the funeral procession. The use of the hellish colors, the chaotic nature of the buildings and street, and the appearance of the citizens reflects a personal angst of Grosz. While *Pillars of Society* falls under Body as Politics because the angst is directed at a specific issue created by people. The specific issue is the angst that is directed at the institutes of power, the pillars of society. I would even say that this example of Body as Politics is a collective angst that is being visualized by Grosz.

Another artist that has inspired my political angst is Peter Saul. Much of Saul's paintings depicts his humor and critique of the American government. In *Pinkville*, Saul is depicting the My Lai massacre. What I enjoy about the painting is that it is taking a risk in the depiction of the serious matter. I think most artists and myself have trouble approaching a subject matter of a serious nature and having to confront your audience reaction to the work. Especially when you depict a massacre in a cartoonish manner taking away the seriousness of the situation. The portrayal of the victims is greatly exaggerated and use racially charged stereotypes. However, the US soldier is not depicted as heroic either. He has a look on his face that gives him the appearance of a dimwit. His body is grotesque, filling up most of the composition as a hulking murdering and raping machine. The manner of Saul's depictions,

while humorous and shocking, is something that is needed. Often, we need someone to hold up that mirror to our society and remind ourselves that this is still an ongoing issue and we can't let this just slide under the carpet.



Figure 4.1 *The Funeral*, 1917-18, George Grosz



Figure 4.2 *The Pillars of Society*, 1926, George Grosz



Figure 4.3 *Pinkville*, 1970, Peter Saul

My own experience of addressing politics in recent times has started with an installation called *If You're Uncomfortable, I'm Uncomfortable*. Even the initial sketch of the nude female figure for this installation caused me some hesitation. There was a lot I was thinking about at this time, my role as male artist, the subject of a female nude and the idea of the gaze. When a painter creates an image of a female nude what are they saying? Are they commenting on the composition of the figure? The mastery of observation to render the likeness of the female form? Whatever the reason was or is the result is that we have an object that is depicting a female nude. Yes, I believe this is political issue in the manner of how we think about art. I question the purpose of a painting depicting a nude female. This was question that had not occurred to me until I made the first sketch for this painting. This is where I struggled with this piece, as to why I was creating it. I didn't want to make this character for their only purpose as visual pleasure.

Around this time though the Brett Kavanaugh hearings had been underway for some time during the summer. Listening to the hearings I still have difficulties with addressing the matter, but this installation is not for visual pleasure. This is designed to make the viewer feel uncomfortable. Listening to Christine B. Ford's testimony as she recounted her story of being sexual assaulted by Kavanaugh assured to me that he would have the book thrown at him. However, that wasn't the case. Somehow Kavanaugh was confirmed and the case against him dissolved. It was frustrating and the angst swelled.

That's why I made *If You're Uncomfortable, I'm Uncomfortable* to be that jab at presenting the uncomfortable. I do need to address though that the irony of this piece is that I myself am a male. I am discussing the continued issues of sexual assault cases made by men against women, as a male observer. I'm also discussing the idea of the male gaze through the perspective as a male. But I am witnessing this unfold and reacting to it, creating the visual response of what I am feeling. My goal is to make you feel uncomfortable about and address this uncomfortable feeling.



Figure 4.4 *If You're Uncomfortable, I'm Uncomfortable*, 2018, Robbie Mann

The newest body of work that will be featured in the thesis show is called *Men in Power*. The alternative title for this collection of portraits can be known as *A Bunch of Old White Men*. I almost see this work stemming from *If You're Uncomfortable, I'm Uncomfortable*, looking at the male counterparts who use their position of power over others. The role of these figures I'm portraying vary, these can be your local political figures, priest, police and to some of the larger figure like CEOs and presidents. You can consider these figures as the cult of personality, the *persona* that is assigned to them base on the position. There is also the created *persona* these figures are making to see to the collective. The smiling and friendly politician that is ready to shake your hand. The hardworking CEO who is sympathetic to the average worker. Or the trustworthy priest who is someone you can always rely on to watch your kids.

I choose to focus on these pillars of our society and the power they pose. To me this was questioning of their own morality. Who are these figures really? Why are they presenting themselves with this façade. So rather than create a series of portraits that depict the appearance of these figures as who they are, I focused on the internal of what they would appear inwards. I'm depicting these figures as grotesque caricatures some based on actually figures in our institutions. I won't provide specific names but, allow the viewer to come to their own conclusion on who they are seeing.



Figure 4.5 Starting form top right: *Mr. Blue Dome*, 2019, *Former Mayor Mr. Straw Teeth*, 2019, *Secretary of Mediocrity Mr. Dinke*, 2020, *Executive Producer Mr. Jelly Jowls*, 2020

In Between Places

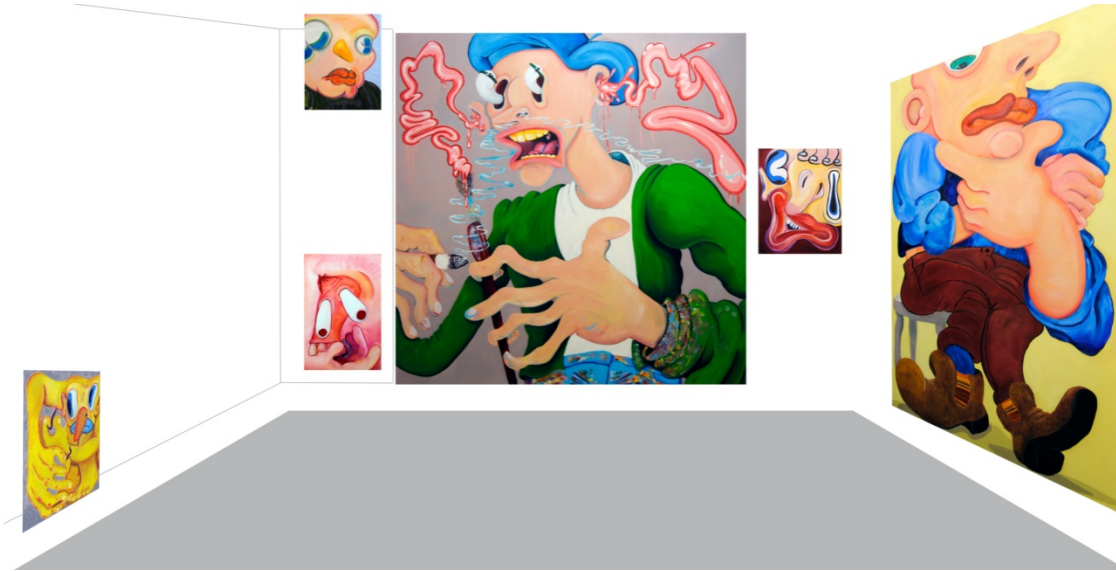
In this final section of my thesis I wish to discuss the installation for the upcoming MFA thesis show. This installation will be occupying the two gallery rooms in the loft of the Prichard Gallery. In the first room, I plan on installing *Men in Power* in a traditional gallery manner of installing. Each of the portraits will be spaced evenly and placed at eye level (60 inches). There will be a total of 15 portraits, five drawings on three of the walls so as the audience walk into the space they are immediately confronted with the portraits. The artwork will also be matted and framed with either the title of the piece presented on the matt board or on a brass plate which will be on the frame. The idea for this room and the manner of the installation was to give the presence of prestige and to evoke a long history of white privilege as figureheads in power.



Visual representation of the *Men in Power* Installation

The installation of the second room will contrast the first room. As viewers walk into the second space, I want them to feel the presence of being overwhelmed. The installation will be similar to that of *The Crowded Room*. It is important to note that, while I describe and provide a visualization of this installation here, the final result may not be exact. The placement of the various paintings and the challenge of creating a desirable composition within this space requires that I be in the space with the work. However, I do have a few ideas that I am certain about and that will be present in the final result. First thing the audience will see as they walk into the space is the painting called *The Confident Artist*. This painting is 60 inches by 60 inches and will be adorned with various smaller paintings around it. On the right wall of the room, I will have the painting *Self Judgement* installed and on its own or with a limited amount of paintings surrounding it. Finally, the wall on the left will have a wall size canvas stretched and attached to the surface. This will be the challenge of creating

new drawings on this wall size canvas while the installation is happening. However, this idea may change and could be replaced with a preexisting drawing that would cover the wall space or with another 60in. x 60in. painting. All three of these central art pieces will have various paintings and drawings installed around, near, or on top of one another.



Visual representation of the *Artist Studio* Installation

Finally, the goal is for both of these rooms to contrast one another greatly in both appearance and in idea. The first installation will seem close to what can be seen in traditional gallery space or in a corporate boardroom and city hall. Here the viewer can look at each of the portraits individually. The artwork for the *Men in Power* series focuses on the notion of body as politics as well as the ideal goal that every artist reaches when completing a body of work and preparing it for the gallery. For the second installation, I wanted to loosely represent an artist studio. This is to reflect the appearance of a studio but also the idea of the internal nature of the artist character. The turmoil of *The Confident Artist* can be seen in the struggle to produce new work while facing deadlines along with struggles of self-confidence. This struggle of the self is represented with the art critic in *Self Judgement*. I wish for the viewer to be able to enter both installations and come to their own conclusions but to use the techniques and visual tools that I've described throughout this thesis.

Conclusion

Much of work is guided by angst. This angst is generated by other people. The actions of some along with the American culture, I am living in. However, rather than focusing on creating images that depict riots or events broadcasted in the media, I am focusing on my own internal reaction based on the ideas of Body Awareness. The characters I am depicting also derive from the theory of Carl Jung's *persona*. Rather than creating the outward appearance of my character to be closer to life I am creating the caricature of their psychology. To me this best depicts the emotional state of the character and provides better information of what type of personality they have. The depiction of the inward appearance is visceral and grotesque in its appearance this is to make you the audience connect to the experience of the figures body.

All of this relates back to the fact that people are awkward, bodies are awkward and life is awkward. Each of us share in the experience of the awkward journey. Our confrontations and reflection of how we feel, bring out those internalized feelings and giving them a visual presence.

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