

THE ART OF THE MESSAGE

FABLES, ALLEGORIES &
AESTHETICISM:



DOMINIC FINOCCHIO
DAVID YATES
LIZZY MARTINEZ

MICHAEL ONKEN
MARGARET KELLER
GLENN MORETON
CHLOE FLANIGAN
DANIEL OVERTURF
SIEGFRIED REINHARDT



cedarhurst
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Fables, Allegories, & Aestheticism: The Art of the Message

This exhibition was originally scheduled to open May 9 through July 19, 2020. The Covid-19 crisis has temporarily closed most museums.

**Cedarhurst rescheduled this exhibition
August 1 — October 4, 2020.**

MITCHELL MUSEUM
New Semantics Gallery

Cedarhurst Center for the Arts
Mt. Vernon, Illinois

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COVER: Left to right; detail, alteration of Yates, *Singin' in the
Rain*; Martinez, *Bread and Bunny*; and Finocchio, *Purged
Ideology*. See booklet images for complete information.

ENDPAPER: Detail, David Yates, *Singin' in the Rain*,
see booklet image for complete information.

The Aesthetic Autonomy of Art and the Art of Messages

Rusty Freeman

Interpreting contemporary works of art can be an extremely rewarding task. Museums play key roles in showing visitors ways in which to open artworks for discussion.

Museums may function as micro-forums of democracy where diverse audiences gather to discuss and talk about cultural representations and its values.

This exhibition and essay compare two modes of art making; a mode which prioritizes the art itself as the “message of form” and a mode that prioritizes the “message of content.” I concede the distinction between form and content is for discussion purposes only.

Those who follow the “message of form” create art without an intended moral or political point of view and instead offer a tableau that viewers can interpret based on what they see. Those who follow the “message of content” create art with an intention to deliver a message of some kind. Both modes have benefits and purpose. At their best, both modes want viewers to see something from life that they had not seen before.



Dominic Finocchio, *Purged Ideology*, 2017, oil, 30x40”

What benefits come from studying art? Museums show how signs and symbols found in works of art accrue meaning, value, and social significance. The skills of reading symbolic art can be used to thoughtfully read the motives behind advertising, the news, or social media.

With both modes of art, viewers interpret for themselves. Advertising, the news, and social media appropriate the art lesson; seductive images convey every content imaginable.

Fables, Allegories, and Aestheticism: The Art of the Message brings together a diverse group of artists with the intent to understand how these artists use art to convey messages. Key are the artists who practice art with no pre-planned message. For these artists, there is an important social value in creating artworks that may stimulate viewers to find their own message. These artists are Dominic Finocchio, Michael Onken, Glenn Moreton, and Daniel Overturf. The artists with implied social messages are David Yates, Lizzy Martinez,



David Yates, *Nighthawks Revisited*, 2015, oil, 49.5x37.5"

Chloe Flanigan, and Margaret Keller. A Siegfried Reinhardt (1924-1984) painting is included from the Cedarhurst permanent collection as an example of a type of coded social commentary found in modern art that viewers must interpret for themselves.

Fables are supernatural short stories featuring a useful truth told by animals or inanimate objects. Fables often conclude with the aphorism or maxim. Aesop is a prime example. Allegories are stories where the moral message is implied but never explicitly stated in the storytelling. John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, published 1678 is a major example. My genres are starting points for discussion. None of my artists invited to this exhibition may be reduced into any one category.

Aestheticism is the late 19th century movement of art for art's sake. Known as The Aesthetic Movement, it is the idea that art only needed to express beauty or formal excellence without the socially mandated requirement to also espouse moral lessons. The Aesthetic Movement (1820s-1880s) together with the especially powerful and influential Neoclassicism (1750s-1850s) and Romanticism (1750s-1850s) gave birth to the Modern Art movement (1870s-1960s).

Modern Art was many things; but above all it championed the priority of the art object itself. Kant had earlier established the appreciation of beauty (form) without interest as a philosophical standard. A short history of Form in Modern Art follows.

In literature, New Criticism emerged in the 1920s which insisted that the work alone was the bearer of meaning. Outside references to biography or history were unnecessary. The new critics insisted that everything needed to understand a poem was already in the poem.

To an important degree, that is still true today; interpretation begins with form, but social and historical issues are also considered.

Clement Greenberg in 1939 began a battle against the inferior products of the mass market arguing that the fine art avant-garde must elevate art with art for art's sake and "pure poetry." This meant "pure" art could be distinguished and separate from banal mass culture. Greenberg in the 1960s solidified late Modernism into an ahistorical formalism.

The early beginnings of postmodernism began in America with the criticism of Greenberg's narrow definition of high art. Pop Art inaugurated the postmodern formal and social critique with its reaction to Abstract Expressionism.

By the late 1970s and 1980s postmodern artists took Pop Art's socially referenced outlook and combined it with Conceptual Art's critical thinking and social commentary to make a new kind of art. The realization grew that it was no longer logical to separate art based solely on its formal qualities from social issues.

With this exhibition we want to explore these topics solely for the value of practicing the reading of art and to consider applying these reading practices to advertising, the news, and social media. □

A short interpretation of *The Magic Game* by the exhibit curator

Siegfried Reinhardt studied at Washington University which coincided with Max Beckmann's tenure. Reinhardt, like Beckmann, was born in Germany and lived in St. Louis. Reinhardt knew Beckmann as a giant within the art world, was inspired in part by Beckmann, but did not completely share Beckmann's dark

Lizzy Martinez,
Little Red Riding Hood, oil,
40x37.5" one
panel from
quadriptych,
40x150"





Siegfried Reinhardt, *The Magic Game*, 1961, oil, wax on masonite, Gift of John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell 1973.1.50

pessimistic vision of the world. However, Reinhardt's *The Magic Game*, 1961, is a moody painting where children play amid abstract, geometric cabinetry against a sheer wall. Circles on the wall appear as holes and moon-like; more circles echo throughout. I think it would be a mistake to interpret the children literally. The tenor of the 1960s was a time of great change and influence. Consider these 60s events- Kennedy elected, nuclear sub Triton and nuclear aircraft carrier Enterprise launched, sit-in protests in the South, birth control pills first marketed, spy plane U-2 shot down, and the Bay of Pigs. Reinhardt's painting is social commentary of a high order. □

To better understand our exhibiting artists pictorial intentions, their statements are published below.

Taken together, these Artist Statements articulate theories of how form and content work in unison to convey messages. Reading their visual statements of art with their written statements offers differing viewpoints of analysis that can be also applied towards reading real world statements of the news, advertising, and social media. The project began with the three principle artists and grew to include the contributing artists.

PRINCIPLE ARTISTS
Dominic Finocchio Statement

My ideas about pictorial structure begin with old masters and their many ways to tell a story. Eventually I developed an interest in some of the first contemporary realists after Abstract Expressionism such as Philip Pearlstein, Alex Katz, or Alfred Leslie; for the most part they affected how I felt about concepts of form as it relates to realism rather than content (although Leslie made a number of narrative history paintings). About fifteen years ago, I discovered



Dominic Finocchio, *Live Theatre*, 2019, oil, 24x30"



Dominic Finocchio, *Eye Contact*, 2019, oil, 24x36"



Dominic Finocchio, *A Significant Choice*, 2019, oil on wood panel, 24x30"

RIGHT Dominic Finocchio, *Fixation*, 2018, oil, 24x36"



painters such as Vincent Desiderio, Bo Bartlett and Julie Heffernan among others, all of whom provided a catalyst for me as it affects the possibilities for narrative. A door opened and I started allowing myself to create scenarios that seemed more personal and went beyond simple genre painting or studio art. In general I am drawn more to ideas that allow idiosyncrasy or personality and something beyond the everyday; elements less related to technical skill and more toward concepts of narration.

A writer I admire a great deal is Marcel Proust for the way he plays with thoughts that wander and only start connecting after many pages; run on sentences become paragraphs that reveal his singular idiosyncratic style. His ability to describe individual personalities, events as they unfold and places where things take place gives incredible life to his work. I think of him as outside the main stream of writing and, the mental images I have had while reading his "In Search of Lost Time" are remarkably vivid. While I don't consciously try to channel the methods he used as transitions from one part of the story to the next, they are quite often at the back of my mind, so to speak, during the planning stages of my compositions.

I work with the belief that the most profound experience a painting can offer happens when nothing has been allowed to assert or endorse a specific narrative. With that belief I devise painted images that invite a viewer to proceed into and wander through a pictorial space until a moment comes when the image reveals enough to provide something meaningful that cannot be verbalized and does so one viewer at a time. Though not categorically symbolist or allegorical, associative thinking is inevitable; ambiguity and indeterminacy encourage thoughtful looking. After an often lengthy preparatory process starting with arbitrary choices of figures, animals, settings, etc.,

combinations appear that resonate in an unforeseen way and quite often those are the most compelling for me. An open mind is often the only path to otherwise inaccessible places. I ask that viewers linger and find aspects of these visual statements to be persuasive and purposeful. □

David Yates Statement

This series of paintings started with a very simple idea, create large-scale portraits of tiny birds. Historically, portraits of this size had been reserved for affluent individuals, and I found this to be somewhat amusing.

Initially, the portraits began as homages to our fine feathered friends, and they incorporated the local flora. As the works progressed, the birds eventually evolved to have human characteristics. Creatively, this development opened an array of new possibilities. Their environments no longer became restricted to just backyards and woodlands. Some of the paintings began to transform into self-portraits or effigies based on my personal experiences and observations of the world around me. Soon, the compositions contained humor and art history, intertwined at times with political and social commentary. The cryptic nature of the objects

included in the paintings left plenty of room for the viewer to devise their own interpretation.

Each piece in this body of work has significant meaning to me, but often it contains themes that everyone understands, whether it pertains to loss, success, spirituality or the current topics of the day.

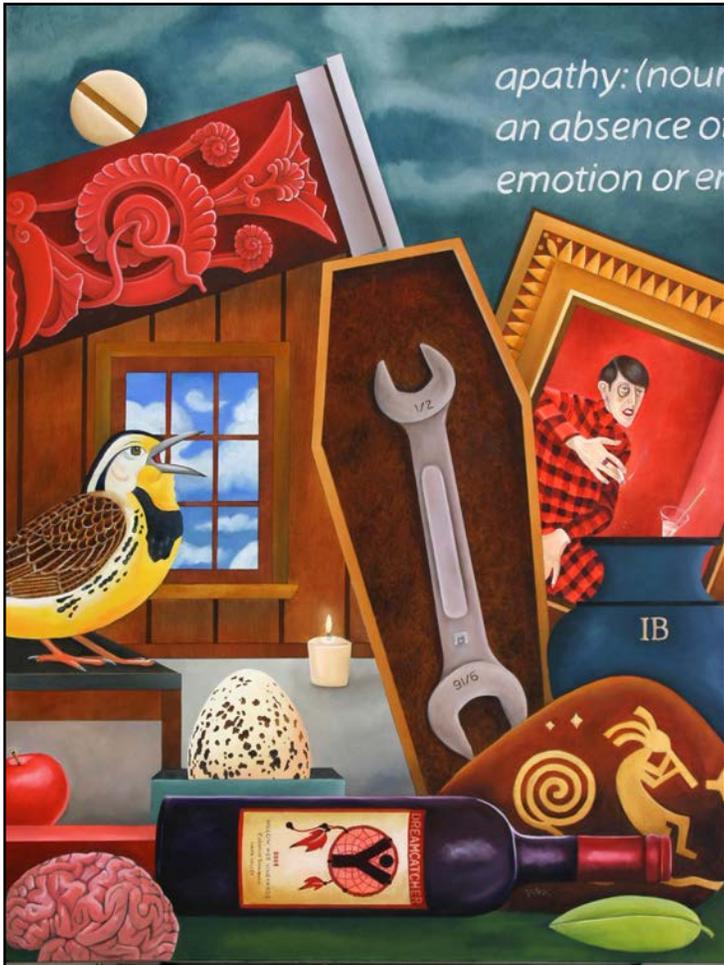
Because of the complexity of some of the paintings, observers with diverse backgrounds often relate to different aspects of the work. Some children seem to like the vivid colors or playfulness of the pieces; whereas, people my age may connect to some of the pop culture references. Other artists recognize the inclusion of works from their art history books.

I enjoy creating objects that each individual person sees from their own perspective.

From a technical standpoint, I draw inspiration from numerous resources. The lack of perspective at times suggests Cubism. A very deliberate foreground, middle ground and background borrows from traditional Renaissance spacing. Inclusion of the written word can be attributed to Pop Art. The whimsical juxtaposition of objects relates to Surrealism.



David Yates, *First Flight*, 2016, oil, 49.5x37.5"



David Yates, *Singin' in the Rain*, 2014, 49.5x37.5"

Part of my philosophy with regard to composition relies heavily on balance. Through experimentation, I've found that many attitudes can co-exist coherently in one space; however, being able to direct the viewer's eye to the main point of interest remains the biggest challenge. Placing well-defined three-dimensional shading next to flat patterns, changing the positions of the light source and completely dismissing scale relationships may not always be



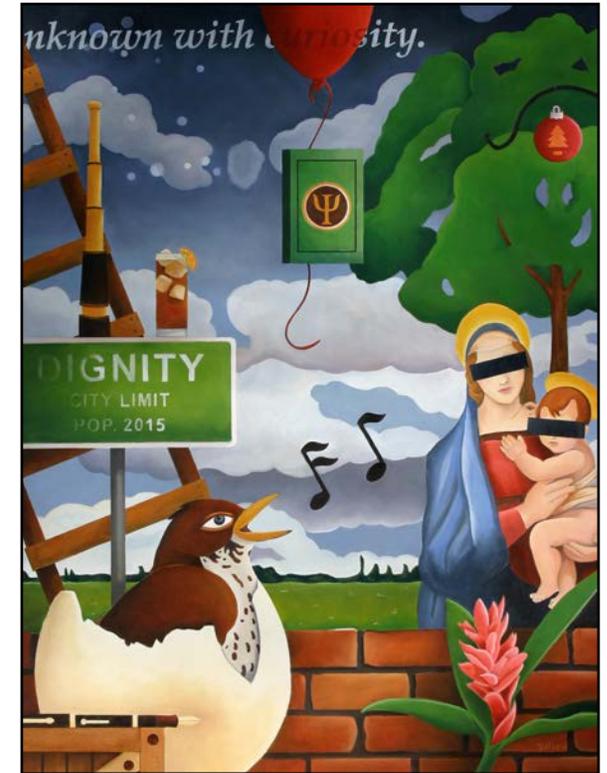
David Yates, *Curiosity and the Catbird*, 2019, oil, 49.5x37.5"

completely apparent, but all these contradictions can occur on one canvas. Ultimately, I attempt to bring some organization to what I view as visual inconsistencies.

I have always considered making art a privilege, and I want that spirit to be reflected in my work. When someone views one of my paintings, I would like to think that they see part of my personality in each piece. □

Lizzy Martinez Statement

As a narrative painter aware of other story medias, for instance film, graphic novels, literature, I have become aware that when painting digs into a tale it has a tendency to



David Yates, *The Good Egg*, 2016, oil, 49.5x37.5"

discombobulate. If I'm standing at the front of an endless possible plane of narrative invention and aware that my primary media has this tendency to bend a yarn as it freezes a moment (*Cocktails* or *You're Always Above Me*) or combines many moments on top of each other (*St. Margaret of Antioch*), I see broken stories. That power that can be beautiful and awkward as it breaks a story a little even as it preserves. From that awareness I start to ask: What is strange? What is broken? Can some stories gain by being told in this way?

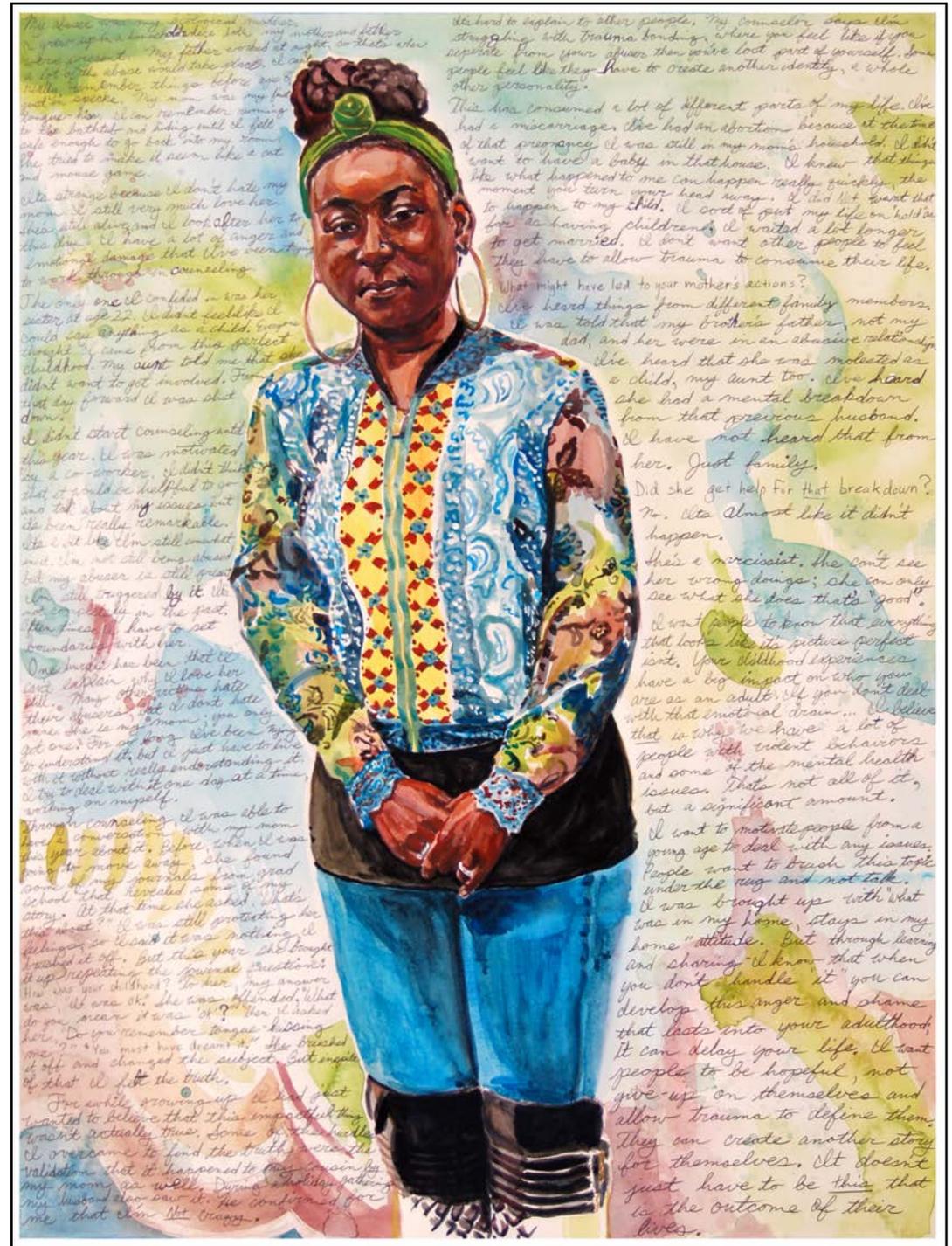
By approaching story aware of narrative gaps, I find flexibility tests for my skills as a painter. Even with an expanse of variation, I tend to

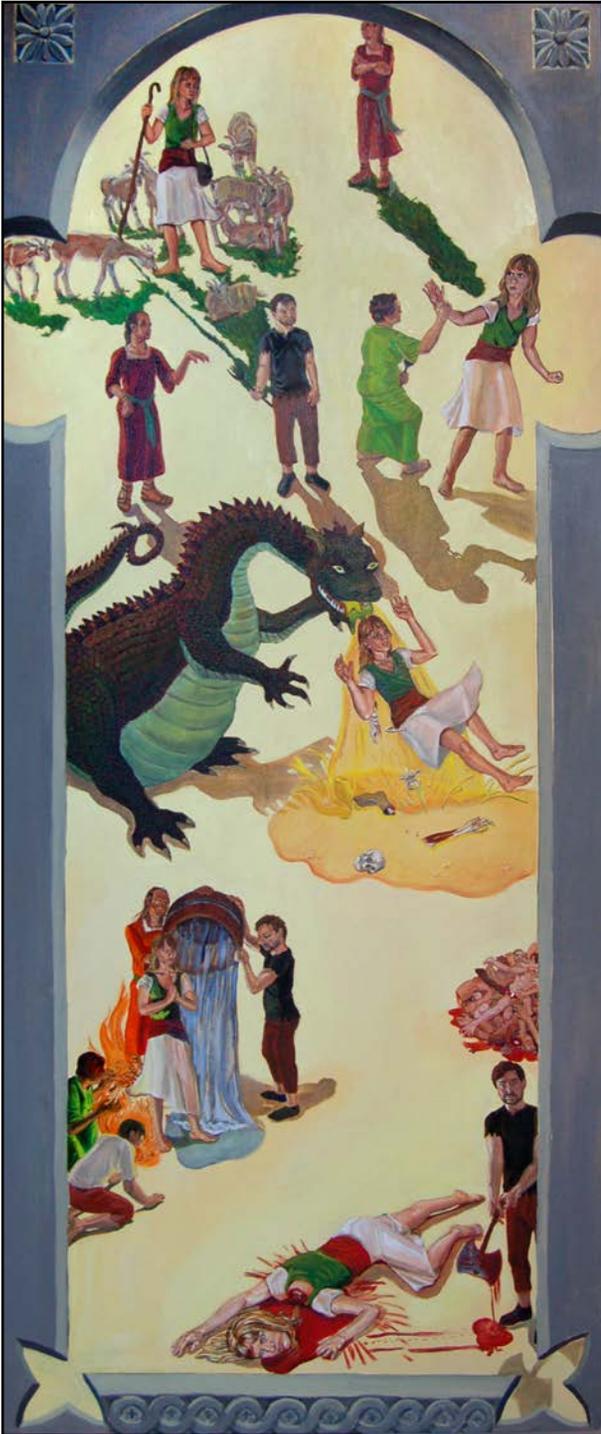
revisit ideas often. Sometimes that involves conveying the hidden, silenced tales such as the first-hand accounts of domestic violence in the **Sister Saints** series. At other points, I may dive into a borrowed and known tale such as Little Red Riding Hood, recontextualizing it to serve my own shock of loss and my repulsion towards a lack of sensible gun control.

I generally don't believe that women artists should relegate towards the soft and safe in 2020. I can paint beauty, but I have that feminist drive not to look away from subjects that might be difficult or to avoid something like violence that could be construed as unfeminine in traditional art circles. For me, Artemisia Gentileschi is the rare woman who is part of that tradition. Bringing the awareness of the human form into contemporary painting for my concerns about our safety or mental states seems virtuous and full of service potential. My work supports a beauty that can be outspoken or strange as a means to prompt viewers to reconsider their own understandings of truth and what stories we tend to share or silence. In the world of survivors and social servants the edgier works have been widely supported and seen as cathartic. However, in the arts community, which can be surprisingly conservative, I have sometimes been labeled a troublemaker.

Each surface is a psychological petri dish, an experiment with elements that I can isolate and incubate to gestate formulas that will best relate emotions from wonder, fear, heartbreak, elation, or relief. There are hints of the present recalling those older themes and the "classics" being made more contemporary. This implies an amount of concern that perhaps we haven't made the progression we need to as a collective culture in terms of safety and acceptance of each other. □

Lizzy Martinez, St. Josephine Bakhita, 2018, mixed media on paper, 29x20.5"





LEFT Lizzy Martinez,
St. Margaret of Antioch, 2019, oil,
68x28"

TOP Lizzy Martinez,
Bread & Bunny,
2014, oil, 36x84.25"

RIGHT Lizzy
Martinez, *Cocktails*,
2014, oil,
66.25x78.25"



CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS
Chloe Flanigan Statement

“Stolen Innocence” The imagery and the narrative of this body of work tells my story about manipulation and sexual assault that I endured over a 3 year period of time by someone I knew and trusted. I found no relief with keeping my story locked inside of me. Sexual abuse and assault on girls and women are important stories to tell in order to promote awareness and healing. The trauma that such victims experience is lifetime trauma, forced to live with and left to cope with. I hope to raise awareness by telling my story, to connect with other victims, to let them know they are not alone, and help them feel empowered again. □

TOP Chloe Flanigan, *His Favorite Game*, 2019, watercolor, color pencil, 15x26”

LEFT Chloe Flanigan, *Playtime*, 2018, watercolor, gouache, color pencil, 20x26”

MIDDLE Chloe Flanigan, *I Don’t Want To*, 2018, watercolor, color pencil, 16x20”

RIGHT Chloe Flanigan, *Hide and Seek*, 2018, watercolor, color pencil, 16x28”



Glenn Moreton Statement

When planning and creating a painting, I focus on the aesthetics, rather than the subject content of my paintings. My mention of aesthetics does not mean that primarily I want to make a “pretty picture.” Realism does not mean that the painting has to be merely “pretty” (and banal!). Saying that I am interested in the aesthetics of the work means that I want the visual elements of the artwork to *engage* the viewer. I particularly am interested in the *composition* of the painting. I select my subject completely by how it will lend itself to an interesting, satisfying composition.

Not being particularly interested in the subject content of a work, I do not want to create a painting that will tell a specific story, or make a social or political statement. I find that approach by artists to be too directive and limiting of how individuals will experience the painting--and often I find such art to be trite, heavy-handed, or even preachy. Similarly, I do not create a work with content that is so obscure and esoteric that the viewer likely will not understand it

unless he or she reads the artist's statement—a statement that often will be so portentous (and pretentious), that rather than enlighten the viewer, it only adds to the person's confusion and creates distance from the piece of art. I prefer art that speaks for itself.

My goal is to create a work that will engage the user and cause the person to react to the painting, but I do not want to dictate what that reaction will be. I want the observer to have a reaction or experience that is unique to her or

him. Even though I am focused on developing the visual elements of the painting, rather than concentrating on the subject content, I find that specific subject themes spontaneously do happen to emerge in my work. Because these themes evolve subconsciously, I find them to be more powerful than if they had been a result of my calculated contrivance. I hope that the viewer has a similar reaction.□

Glenn Moreton, *Reminiscence*, 2006, acrylic, 24x28”



Michael Onken Statement

As a pre-television only child I was early fed on fables, myths, and the mysteries of nature quite literally at my mother's knee. They populated my drawings then, and seven decades on, granted a certain loss of innocence, continue to exert an influence today.

I find that the creative process often begins in an apprehension that blurs the conventional boundaries of perception and makes aware the signs and patterns of significance under the surface of appearance. That whiff of mystery when the ordinary flows into the other and hints at the transcendent draws me into all that I love in art, music, poetry, the natural world and the making of things. Perhaps there is only one tale repeating in the telling and searching out endless development in countless forms.

In my studio work I don't set up a narrative to promote any strategic purpose or specific reading. I would like to like to think that the viewer does not need to know where, when, or exactly what is going on in order to relate to an image conditioned by their own experience. □



LEFT
Michael Onken,
Tea with a Traveler,
2019, watercolor,
gouache, acrylic,
11x16"

RIGHT
Michael Onken,
Kol Nidre, 2020,
watercolor,
gouache, acrylic,
16x11"



Margaret Keller Statement

In my large, vivid, painting *Let Them Eat Cake*, I was imagining a narrative that projected Marie Antoinette, infamous queen of France and symbol of pampered, insensitive royalty, into the present-day. We find ourselves beside her, inside the lavish gilt and marble interior of Versailles Palace, gazing out the window and seeing the approach of a dark, threatening storm. Her unfeeling public statement regarding the famine of the poor, as she consumes this elaborate display of the fanciest, richest desserts (consisting of contemporary junk foods), is *let them eat cake*, but the small place card nestled next to a crystal goblet of sherry and inscribed “J’ai peur (I’m afraid)” hints at her looming sense of eminent ruin.

When I painted this in 1987, the current events of Ronald Regan’s presidency included a savings and loan scandal with rampant inflation; an unstable economy; strike-breaking and undermining of formerly strong unions such as the air traffic controllers; the Iran Contra scandal of illegal arms sales involving Oliver North, the CIA, a shadow government, and the Sandinistas; US ghettos in upheaval, along with the poverty-stricken classes; rampant crime and drug abuse, and the HIV crisis. Simultaneously, the Soviet Eastern-Bloc countries were breaking away from the Soviet Union and turning towards the lure of capitalism in all its corruption. Conceptually, I chose a message dealing with the conflict between the entitled rich versus the poor masses. Visually, I was attracted to the posh beauty and intricacy of the elements I incorporated into the composition. With a large window that opens onto a scene of nature as a threat, this painting foreshadows my current *Studio Window: Disaster Series*.

Both paintings [in the exhibit] involve puns textually and visually. Both also utilize food, history, and art history to activate the narrative message. *Let Them Eat Cake* has a political focus, while *Tortellini Means Venus’ Navel* [not pictured] examines the sensuous gaze. In each, form supports content as content simultaneously creates form in a symbiotic, entwined relationship. □

Margaret Keller,
Let Them Eat Cake,
1987, watercolor on
Arches, 45x31”



Daniel Overturf Statement

The production of a large-scale narrative tableaux assemblage for the expressed purpose of a photograph requires a string of conscious acts that are all rooted in storytelling. Empirical notations, in the form of collected scribbles denoting overheard stories, shared tales, momentary glimpses and/or fleeting vignettes taken from the physical world and dreams, spawn the initial sketches. The (awkwardly drawn) sketches then go through transformations until objects, figures and space begin to conjure a rough draft of a photograph. In a studio designed explicitly for building a photograph over a period of weeks, the set is

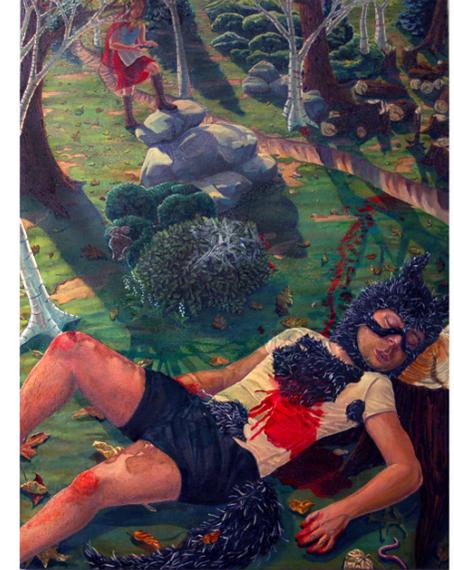
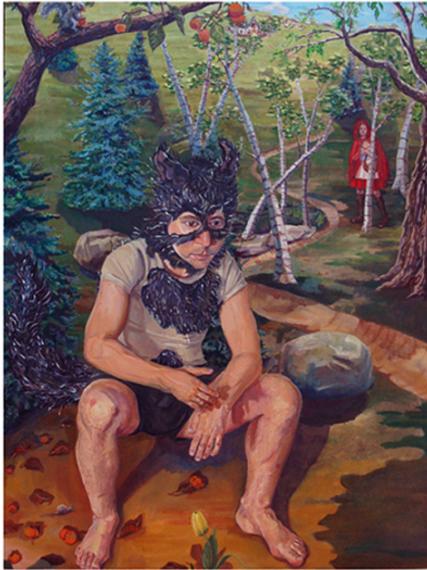
constructed from the ground up and also down, from a large set of overhead scaffolds and the work proceeds until a final image is captured — all in camera.

In answer to the question posed by this exhibit, the idea of a potential message is woven into every step of the process of the story's creation. The selection of the props, the lighting, the figures and every element relates to the narrative's dynamic. A working title is often a guide, similar to authoring an in-progress script or novel, which then determines subsequent decisions. Words certainly shape the final image.

“Lonnie Swept the Playroom and He Swallowed Up all He Found” was one such title, in this case taken from a song lyric. Relying on allusions that would emerge from those words and the idea of a substance-induced, false Superman-mentality spawned memories of bygone times. Neither nostalgia nor regret nor even ambivalence informs this approach since the memory or impression renders more substantive inspiration. I find memory, with all its foibles and vexations in play, is the cornerstone of storytelling and in that story a viewer may find their own message.□



Daniel Overturf,
*Lonnie Swept the
Playroom and
Swallowed Up All
He Found*, 1994,
darkroom C-print
from original
camera negative,
23x40”



Lizzy Martinez, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 2018, oil, 40x150"

This exhibition exhibited 44 works of art.

Artist Hometowns

Dominic Finocchio, Lizzy Martinez, and Margaret Keller are from St. Louis. David Yates lives in Edwardsville, IL. Glenn Moreton and Chloe Flanigan are from Mt. Vernon, IL. Michael Onken lives in Carbondale, IL. Daniel Overturf lives in Murphysboro, IL.

Exhibition Curator

Rusty Freeman is the Director of Visual Arts at Cedarhurst; originally from Nashville, TN.

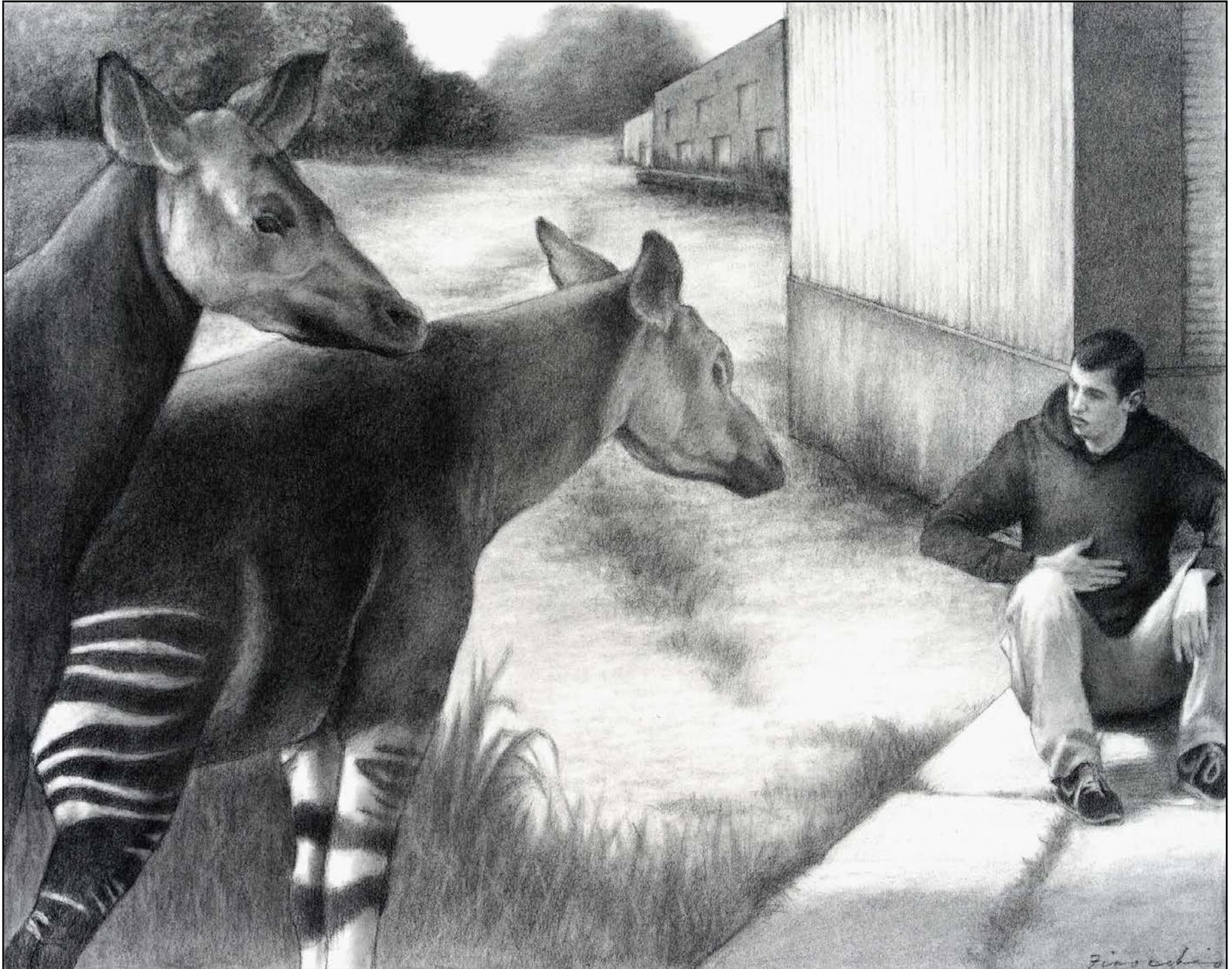
Cedarhurst thanks all the artists for participating in this themed exhibition of reading modes of art. The spring of 2020 has become a grave time as we adjust and work together to overcome the worldwide health, financial, and political crisis. Our exhibition of art is both pleasant pastime and useful practice. Like everyone, scientists and artists read and interpret the world. Reading the world and sensing danger or beneficial value is what we do first. Reading art can be enjoyable as well as having real world practical application.

Dominic Finocchio www.dominicfinocchio.com
David Yates davidmyates.com
Lizzy Martinez www.lizzymartinez.com

Michael Onken www.cedarhurst.org/past-main-gallery-the-paintings-of-michael-onken
Margaret Keller margaretkellerstudio.com
Glenn Moreton glennmoreton.artspan.com/home
Chloe Flanigan www.facebook.com/ChloeFlaniganArt/
Daniel Overturf www.danieloverturf.com

These Days

Artist Websites





PREVIOUS: Dominic Finocchio, *A Place to Rest*,
2018, charcoal on paper, 14.75x18.75"

ENDPAPER: Detail, Lizzy Martinez, *Cocktails*, see
booklet image for complete information.



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