Infrastructure

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INFRASTRUCTURE

by

SCOTT FOXX

(Under the Direction of Jessica Burke)

ABSTRACT

The paintings in this series depict sensations and forms drawn from a collaged, painted surface, referencing examples of painting from the Early Renaissance and the pure Formalism of the mid 20th century. Collage materials lend both conceptual and physical directions to the compositions, in that it is symbolic of the multi layered experience of modern people in a technological society. Imitating painting’s gestural, linear energy in an illusory manner, the paper and paint layers invert expected hierarchies of space. I am analyzing the condition of the painter, the ideas of painting as an activity and product, with myself at the center as ‘producer’, exposing not only substrate, but also methodology, through varied paint applications. The act of making the painting is a self-reflexive exercise meant to cause the viewer to reflect upon their own act of looking, questioning the relationship between presentation and understanding. Although
each object begins with traditional paint application, I quickly move to experimental modes of craft to explore compositional juxtapositions that arise in process allowing my work to evolve independent of the historic source material. Following the development of the base surface, the collage elements are applied and using both actual collage and implied collage I arrive at the specific balance between ambiguous forms and space. The edge of the panel is used as a boundary in order to reassert the painting’s formal and physical properties, like the exposed wood grain, but what is contained is equal to what is omitted. Both the eccentric edges and the palettes of many of the objects are inspired by historic models. The science of architectural perspective and color scheme also become part of the vocabulary of the painting reflecting atmosphere or clarity, in either concept or reality. I am always conscious of my use of space and the forms interacting inside as a reflection of the peculiar intersection of people and technology I observe everyday. Is the availability of communication technology adversely affecting our actual interactions? This work is intended to communicate this collapsed experience of the real and the virtual and provoke an awareness in the viewer.

INDEX WORDS: Painting, Formalism, Frank Stella, Piero della Francesca, Thomas Nozkowski
INFRASTRUCTURE

by

SCOTT FOXX


A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

STATESBORO, GEORGIA
INFRASTRUCTURE

by

SCOTT FOXX

Major Professor: Jessica Burke
Committee: Marc Mitchell
            Julie McGuire

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DEDICATION

This thesis work is dedicated to my family who inspired me and tolerated my unconventional choices in the pursuit of the knowledge and skill that this degree represents. I would also like to especially thank Ellie Foxx who never knew she was an artist but helped me to find one inside myself. A special dedication is extended to my partner Timothy Chapman whose boundless optimism and energy sustained me throughout.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purely formal painting often lacks the humanist core that is present in traditional painting. But a common thread found between historic work and contemporary art is a concern with metaphysical, spiritual and psychological philosophy that make up much of our collective unconscious. Archetypes of creation and destruction found in the works of Anselm Keifer, questions of mortality as in the sculpture of Damien Hirst, even magic and deification as occurs in the oeuvre of Kiki Smith all reflect the same concerns found in Pierro della Francesca, Giotto, Pisanello and others. However, the modern period of the 20th century abandoned traditional representational modes opting for a self referential model that strived for an absolute truth. It is this lack of familiar forms representing the narrative tropes of the past that often times leaves viewers baffled, wondering why the painting does not behave in a utilitarian manner, like a tea pot, serving their need for explication. But it is an exhaustion with such pedestrian, pictorial expectations, easily serviced by other more efficient means (ie; photography or literature) that drives the contemporary artist to other questions and processes concerning the act of making itself. My work is an attempt to navigate between the asceticism of pure formalism and the soul of the aesthetic experience found in Existentialism. In order to suggest these historical
models in contrast to the contemporary perception I often utilize structural, formal properties from early Renaissance paintings, blended with a purely Formalist sensibility. I can then insert my own autobiographical material and contemporary methods to address painting as both process and product.
CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

The interplay between science and mathematics, developed and used by the early Renaissance painters to craft realistic spaces of religious scenes can be seen as a precursor of the Modernist interest in the grid and the picture plane. Rationalist based philosophies of painting take the place of the spiritual concern in the modern version, compressing act and object together. Such scientific engagement in art is most particularly seen in the works of Frank Stella and the Minimalists, where the act has been simplified down to the most essential components. In my paintings, I strive to find a common formalist thread to tie these disparate histories together, and found that bridge partly in the perspectival methods developed by the Italian masters to convey believable space. The addition of atmospheric perspective and color manipulation found in the master works serve to deepen the painterly conversation I am interested in. Combining a simplified method of perspective, with the color and methods of collage, I have found a process that allows translation of the source information into a contemporary idea.

I am suspicious of grand narratives that lack concern for the diverse, simultaneous or even contradictory view, however, I am attracted to them nonetheless. Because of this discomfort I seek personal narratives relative to the grand. Rather than replacing one Hero myth with an updated one, I question hierarchies themselves. By questioning structures and systems rather than their symbolic icons narratives can be expanded and contracted as needed. The
contemporary narrative is open ended which allows one to incorporate numerous sources to address the limited attention spans of today’s audience. To illustrate the point, a poem is preferable to a long novel in being both short and to the point and suggestive of sensations rather than full of specific imagery. This power of suggestion allows an inclusive, though directed, experience for the viewer. Aligning process with these multifarious narratives I developed a vocabulary equally as flexible. I do not wish to cling to any one process or methodology, as I believe it leads to rote production and so choose to work in media that allows for a maximum level of variation. I find it very important to reveal the substrate (wood or paper) in some manner as a gesture to acknowledge the material reality of the painting. Although my final product may differ radically, I believe there is a link between artists of any generation, from teacher to student. In the end, the creative act of the early Renaissance painters through artistic movements such as the Casualists, is all the same; everyone strives to achieve the intangible aesthetic moment, which must be authentic if it is to be worth the time to do it. My own experience, reflected in my painting, combines these influences with the Postmodernist ideals of my undergraduate education and the lessons of my mentor, Larry Jens Anderson, whose mantra ‘Do anything’ has encouraged extensive experimentation with media within the two dimensional format. This liberal application of media and technique has provided me the tools to harmonize these classical and modern influences with contemporary issues of technology and society, and consider the place of the artist within today’s culture.
CHAPTER 2
INFLUENCES AND MENTORS

Larry Jens Anderson was raised in a large family in rural Kansas, an upbringing that shaped his outlook on life and art, but more from adversity than encouragement. As one of nine children growing up under the ideals of traditional gender roles and fundamentalist Baptist doctrine, Anderson has long understood the late 20th century conflicts between social progressivism and the traditional American socio/political landscape. A gay person himself, as was his late twin brother, and a lesbian sister, Anderson has been embracing feminist, gay and racial issues in his mixed media works for over 30 years. Through his work, Anderson struggled against the social inequities he and others suffered throughout his life. Communicating through aggressive, didactic, but often humorous expressions, Anderson is a strong believer in the power of art to affect change. Utilizing every material needed, as well as every device of formal content, including the elusive ideal of ‘beauty’, Anderson forces his viewers into a quandry, questioning what they believe as suggested by his works. He states, “Humor is a device, as is beauty. They bring people to the work in a non-threatening way. Someone may laugh, but they have to question themselves about why a slur is funny.”¹ Anderson states his position as an artist succinctly saying of himself, “I make things. Sometimes I don’t know if the idea is going to

be three-dimensional, flat, or four-dimensional. On many occasions I've dragged
an idea through different media."\(^2\) The statement, manifested in his teaching, can
be simplified to an often heard dictum in his drawing, painting and printmaking
classes, “Do anything”. One could hypothesize that Anderson appropriated his
motto from Jasper Johns who said, “Take an object. Do something to it. Do
something else to it.”\(^3\) As a student such a statement was liberating for me and
removed any barrier from my creative process. When I arrived to the Atlanta
College of Art to begin study in 1994 I had very little formal art education to speak
of. In my first semester I quickly learned how very far behind I actually was in
understanding contemporary ideas of art. Anderson, with his mantra, and others
like it, such as “It’s not important to know what you are doing, but what you have
done”, helped me to understand and move forward making work about Southern
culture, race and personal experience. Aside from such free wheeling activities
suggested by his pedagogical philosophy Anderson was also concerned that
students should be conscious of history. To this end, and being well versed in
Classical modes of drawing, he incorporated this content into our curriculum.

In his career as an educator for the Atlanta College of Art and currently
SCAD Atlanta, Anderson has taken advantage of teaching abroad in Cortona,
Italy. While there he deepened his research into the works of such favorite Italian
masters as Jacopo Pontormo (1494 - 1557) and Agnolo Bronzino (1503 - 1572).

\(^2\) Paul, paragraph 7.
This resulted in an ongoing series of large drawings titled *Italian Temples* which feature meticulous renderings of architecture, broken statuary and well known figures. *Golden Background Temple* is a prime example, featuring the head of a Greek or Roman youth in profile hovering in a Classical post and lintel structure (Fig. 1). Each image expands upon contemporary statements of formal beauty and ideas of memorializing in our new ‘Golden’ age. In the series *All Dick, No Jane* Anderson uses the childhood reading primer character of Dick rendered in a variety of modes, such as in *Dick Learns to Draw* (Fig. 2) that features a faux notebook paper background with nostalgic paper doll dresses sized to fit Dick, who appears in the left quadrant, waving cheerfully. The Classical influence is seen in other works such as *Gilt-Guilt* (Fig. 3) framed in a sculptural post and lintel frame of faux onyx, complete with columns, finials and a gold leaf background reminiscent of the *Temple* work. The series mixes gender discussion with historical references while addressing the idea of the male artist as a ‘sissy’, and decoration as the realm of the homosexual.

Although finished works are the preferred means of seeing a master’s works, Anderson prefers the study, the sketchbook page, and the ‘mistake’. In *Orange Fra Angelico* (Fig. 4) torn edges, sketchy lines and an abraded, perhaps scraped and sanded surface, lend the work an air of austere history, while the collage of imagery remains distinctly contemporary. In such works Anderson extols the act of the artist in the process of free creativity leaving behind his marks and gestures, while working towards an ideal. Anderson incorporates this
method into his curriculum, feeling that copying the Classical model establishes relevance for the student in art history while being mindful of present day issues. Students not only exercised mechanics, but also developed a relationship to the history of art, which is critical in cultivating responsible artists and scholars. It is to this relationship that I have returned for a sense of grounding and relevance, in the making of my own work.

It is perhaps from a desire for this familiar 'grounding' that I turned to my own favorites of the early Renaissance, such as Piero della Francesca (1415 - 1492) to find inspiration for my graduate level art. A Mannerist and an accomplished portraitist of the Florentine school, it is speculated that Piero may have studied under Leonardo da Vinci, though this is disputed. Arguably, his work shows some influence, but it is Piero's interest in the mathematical theorems of Euclid, studied while he was young to prepare him for a life in commerce, which led him to the lifelong study of geometry and science as represented in painting and architecture. Piero’s work is noted for clear, rationally conceived spaces, and naturalistic observations, as well as meticulously crafted geometries, focusing the viewer on the figures. Throughout his works perspective lines merge with figurative elements in a pleasing manner so perfectly arranged as to be almost 'cold’, especially when compared with the

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4 Jeryldene M. Wood, “Piero della Francesca” in *The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca*, ed. Jeryldene M. Wood (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign: Cambridge University Press. 2002), 1, “In these paintings (of his oeuvre)...clear, rationally conceived spaces, populated by simplified figures and grand architecture coexist with exquisite naturalistic observations: reflections on the polished surfaces of gems and armor, luminous skies, and sparkling rivers and streams.”
emotional complexity of Leonardo, or others of his contemporaries. His few works make one pay attention, or in the words of Peter Schjeldhal, discussing Piero’s *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Four Angels* (1460-70) (Fig. 5), “All the faces, while individualized, are impassive; they are not quite expressionless but preternaturally calm. The figures are rounded and sculptural. The oil colors—reds, blues, browns, whites, grays—glow in a soft, raking light. The picture has a magnetic dignity, typical of Piero. He makes a viewer’s spirit sit up straight. The work is only three and a half feet high, but it feels monumental and, at the same time, intimate, as if it were addressing you alone. It’s a kind of art that may change lives.”

Piero composed three treatises on mathematics and paintings in his life and the texts still stand today as a source of interest to both artists and mathematicians, their meticulous properties of laying out believable, geometric spaces on two dimensional surfaces, and creating measurements for architectural constructions still applied. Though many of his works were destroyed or altered, as is the case for *The Annunciation* (1460) (Fig. 6), what is left still promotes discourse into the relationship of mathematics to art.

Contemporary scholars focus less on mimesis, as many of Piero’s techniques have been bested by his descendants, and more so on the abstract qualities of his geometric proportions and sophisticated compositions. Not only could Piero utilize rigid patterns and perspectival lines, he could also exploit blocks of color and the movement of the forms against the picture plane to suggest a modern

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6 Wood, 9 - 12.
sensibility. Consider for example his *Legend of the True Cross* (1452-1466) (Fig. 7), a vast mural conveying the 13\textsuperscript{th} century legend of the cross of the Passion. Throughout the composition the viewer is drawn into deep recesses of space and is then instantly confronted with sharp angles of geometry, forcing the figures in the work into a narrow sliver of foreground. The work seems as much about the geometry (perhaps a symbolic allusion to the importance of the Cross) as it is about the characters. Looking for a contemporary comparison to the geometric phenomenon I observed numerous similarities in mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century Formalism, particularly in the work of Frank Stella.

From the 1950’s into the late 1960’s the American painter Frank Stella symbolized what was, for many, the height of the avant garde in art. His canvases were vast, measuring some 10 feet in either direction, they were harshly geometric and shaped, and most disturbing to many, they were absolutely flat and devoid of any flourish.\(^7\) Where was the hand of man in these works? For Stella, humanity was both everywhere and nowhere in the painting, simultaneously, the flatness and simplicity of the paint applied to the canvas being the ultimate distillation of what the act of Formalist painting was.\(^8\) The philosophy of Formalism practiced by Stella, as extolled by the venerable critic Clement Greenberg, was an evolution from the early twentieth century Constructivist movement. This idea of creating works derived from the essential


\(^8\) Harry Cooper and Megan Luke, *Frank Stella 1958* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 5, excerpted from Bruce Glaser, “Questions to Stella and Judd”, “My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there, what you see is what you see.”
visual elements of art, these being planes and lines, ordered within the grid, and made from impersonal materials such as plastic, metal and paint was known collectively as Minimalism. But in any living system there is the constant exponent of change and in time many of the early adherents to the Minimalist dogma defected for less restrictive terrain. Stella was among them and so in the early 1960’s broke with the traditional rectilinear shape of his canvas to create ‘irregular polygons’ such as *Wolfeboro IV* (1966) (Fig. 8). These shaped canvases were painted in flat expanses of color with one shape abutting another, with color as the only other factor in the spatial manipulation. It is in these works that I focus both my artistic and scholarly research.

Of these works created by Stella, it is the earlier shaped canvases from 1958 through 1975 that most clearly relate to the works of Piero. Besides the use of angles and the force afforded by the push/pull of color, there is the irregular edge. Many of Piero’s works were murals or panel paintings installed, or cut to be so installed, into oddly shaped niches in altar walls. As such, many that we have today, taken out of their original place, still bear this odd shape that one is then reminded of when looking at the works of Stella. But whereas Piero had to conform his images to the shape provided, Stella found a way to invert this directive.

The painting processes for Stella all followed a similar trajectory, which included an inspiration of a place, or person, to which Stella would assign a

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9 Luke, pg. 19, “With respect to his understanding of modernism Greenberg had no truer followers than the literalists (that is minimalists).”
shape and/or color. This inspiration was not so much a personal or expressive choice, as Stella had little use for such sentimentality, rather it was another way to impose an order on his process. This plane would then be subdivided into no more than three shapes, differing slightly in scale, all geometric and relating one to another from their respective angles and edges. Flat colors completed the paintings, which were meticulously taped in later works, but free-handed in the early Black series (Fig. 9). These finished paintings created vibrations that appeared to hover as one colored mass pushed against another, competing for dominance. Minimalist sculptor Donald Judd said of Stella’s shaped canvases, “The order is not rationalistic or underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another. A painting isn’t an image.” When I look at a fresco by Piero, such as the Polyptych of the Misericordia (1445-1462) (Fig. 10), or the Polyptych of Saint Anthony: The Annunciation (1470) (Fig. 11), I cannot help but see Stella’s irregular polygons, such as Chocorua 4 (1966) (Fig. 12). Although Stella’s works are adamantly without outside context or narrative, there remains the artifact of their unique form, and the artist’s choices; an order based on the purity of the expression.

There is one issue of dispute that bears mentioning within the work, that being the naming of the individual panels. To name something is to give it an identity or referent and Stella named many of his works with very specific monikers. This was in opposition to the Formalist dogma as many Minimalists and modernists adamantly refused titles. Nevertheless, many of Stella’s notable

works bear very specific names. Through lists he made we know that he often preceded a series by defining basic forms and then following them with the name of a familiar person or place. In 1963 for example Stella began a series referred to as the *Purple* paintings such as *Hollis Frampton* (1963)(Fig.13), because they were all painted in the same commercially manufactured, purple tinged metallic paint, on variously shaped canvases, the list stating:

- Equilateral Triangle   Leo Castelli
- Square   Hollis Frampton
- Rhombus   Carl Andre
- Pentagon   Charlotte Tokayer
- Hexagon   Sidney Guberman
- Octagon   Henry Gardner (Geldzahler)
- Decagon D (Emile de Antonio)
- Trapezoid   Ileana Sonnabend

Numerous other lists of a similar nature follow for other series, which beg the question whether or not Stella’s work was truly about nothing other than it’s own reality. If so, why the naming of the outside reference? Stella was noted as a businessman and with his Yankees cap and stout cigar at openings he played the part of eccentric artist. This naming practice could have been a clever marketing tool, similar to Andy Warhol’s courting of celebrities. Regardless, it can only be surmised that Stella created his own logic within these relationships.

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Assuming that all artists share some desire to feel connected to their products, even those with seemingly impersonal forms, perhaps there is some personal code we will never be privy to. However tangential the link may be, and in the act of naming he distanced himself further from the purity of the Greenbergian Formalist practice. This liberation allowed Stella to move into a new, more personal sphere of work, bound only by his own inventions and interests defying unity and embracing more elaborate compositions and the ambiguous.

Whichever the reason for his shift his inspiration was, and continues to be, significant. On the heels of Stella’s rise into the era off the 1970’s, came the work of another significant influence on my painting, that being the work of Thomas Nozkowski. This contemporary of Stella whose work owed so much to him had a quality that I was missing in Stella and the other Minimalist and Formalists. The naming activity of Stella had suggested something humanist in his work, but research did not conclusively bear this out. Nozkowski however, though his works are all nameless, pulse with life suggesting they are definitely ‘about’ something. With this later research I was able to fill a personal void perhaps missed in the works of Stella, that being how abstract painting can be personal and still remain formal.

Thomas Nozkowski currently enjoys a renaissance of sorts, embraced by the Casualists, who share Nozkowski’s disarming simplicity in their approach to making painting. This group of young artists, the Casualists or Provincial Painters, emerging in the later 2000’s, which includes painters Becky Yazdan,
Keltie Ferris, and Lila Luloff, among others, all cite Nozkowski as an influence. This new conversation of abstract painting is separate from Greenbergian Formalism in that painterly affects of light and surface are acceptable, as are allusions to ideas and forms outside of the paintings experience, without undermining the paintings philosophical underpinnings as Formalist abstraction. They are Frank Stella, but with more charm. They are the ‘nerds’ of painting; lovable but hopelessly awkward, reflecting our modern sense of uncertainty and doubt in today’s culture. But it is a testament to the eternal virtues of focus and consistent practice that so many current artists look to such a humble, dedicated figure for inspiration. Nozkowski has been working for 48 years as a painter and educator, a remarkable achievement, but until recently many would have been hard pressed to tell you much of anything about him or his work. Nozkowski is conspicuous in his modesty of personality and product, though he has been seen internationally and is held in many of the most important collections and spaces. Sometime in 1974, Nozkowski made a seminal choice, which was that he would only make paintings that related to personal experience, and that they would all be done on common canvas panels, 16 x 20 inches in size, which he states was a political choice, and then later a formal one. Larger canvases do exist, 30” x 40”, but Nozkowski links a sense of intensity to the smaller format that is appealing. He states, “...the most important reason (for the scale) is that I can bring the maximum intensity I am capable of to the work.”

12 Thomas Nozkowski, (email correspondence), interview by Scott Foxx, March 26, 2014. “Today the most important reason is that I can bring the maximum intensity I am capable of to the work.”
of scale, the artist then moved to the composition itself. The color and form of a particular work would be derived from his experiences but he had no interest in mimesis. Titles offer no link, the works being ‘Untitled’ followed by a series of digits. Whether or not this code is significant or is merely an ordering device is unclear, but the device serves to minimize discussion of the source material. If any representational imagery arises through the act of painting it would only be to suggest the experience poetically, but not as an illustration. Over the past two decades the size of his canvas has varied from the 16” x 20”, to a still modest 22” x 30” inches, yet his allegiance to his abstraction based on personal experience has remained constant. The works are at times awkward and gawky such as *Untitled (7-61)* (1995) (Fig. 14) with it’s washed ground, silhouetted forms and aggressive red circles pushing against the foreground, but are also graceful and luminous. Consider the fluid patterns of light in *Untitled (P-13)* (2012) (Fig. 15) a work rich and complex, undeniably beautiful, but again, somehow both familiar and alien. Each painting is masterfully executed, pushing and pulling against the confines of their edges. Many earlier works focused on the grid as a formal device but Nozkowski, as a perpetual student of himself, put the format aside for sometime and developed new processes; Nozkowski is suspicious of any device that becomes a ‘crutch’. In this manner Nozkowski’s work is difficult to classify.

Larger takes (much) longer or involves a sacrifice in intensity. Every once in a while I do a 30 x 40” canvas -- there were two in my last exhibition -- but I have no interest in getting any larger. 22 x 30” is just about right.”

13 Nozkowski. “… I try to question any device I easily fall back on.”
as there are few similarities one to the next. The grid has however reappeared in recent works from the early to recent 2000’s. In keeping with his method it is a new tool with duties beyond simple formatting, one of those being a relationship to the historical.

Of particular interest is Nozkowski’s appreciation of the work of Antonio di Puccio de Cereto, known as Pisanello, a 15th century painter and sculptor, whose work The Vision of Saint Eustace (1438-1442) (Fig. 16) Nozkowski saw in 1975 to profound effect. He states, “I saw the painting in London in 1975. I don’t know how to describe the feeling, but it was as if I knew why every stroke was made. Every color, every shape. I thought it profoundly moving, and in fact the first paintings I made in the format I now work in—mostly 16×20 inch panels—were inspired by some of the shapes and colors and images in the Legend. I was trying to find out why those elements work.” Nozkowski goes on to discuss the work’s nearly magical properties which defy easy explanation, qualities which he strives to capture in his own works, hovering between certainty and inevitability and a precarious novelty. Illuminating the point more specifically, Nozkowski goes on to reference a book by the writer Vladimir Nabokov titled “Bend Sinister” (1947) which Nabokov later said was based on Nabokov’s observation of a spoon shaped puddle outside of his study window in Cambridge.14 Although this may seem to lack a certain profundity one might hope for, such a response to a simple phenomenon is precisely what motivates many artists to do what they do.

That is, to simply respond to the act of seeing something enticing, with an expression that will hopefully capture the moment for someone else to experience as well. It is this link between source material, inspiration, and the final product, which I am working to emulate in my own paintings.
CHAPTER 3
MEDIA AND FORMAL ISSUES

The series that preceded this thesis body, *Bento*, was an investigation of spatial manipulation through color and pattern, as well as linear perspective. Through this work I became interested in simulating various effects, such as splattered or dripped paint, in collage. If orthogonals and colored planes could be used to create the illusion of spatial recession, then why couldn’t I employ a similar approach to illusionistic mark making, this being the painterly stroke? I began with simple traced stencils of splatters that could then be cut out as seen in *Bento 5 (Fascinator)* (2013) (Fig. 17). Expanding upon the idea I tried applying swirls and gestures of paint to a slick, poster paper. When the paint was mixed to the right consistency it left a mark that was both physical and calligraphic, the individual peaks and valleys of the paint held in stasis as in the blue stroke of paint in *Eustace* (2013) (Fig. 18). By carefully cutting out these pieces and collaging them into the paintings surface I was able to move between other marks, regardless of when they were applied. The affect was both static but suggestive of movement, wavering between gesture and the deliberate. I became more interested in this collapse of the figure/ground relationship that allowed me the freedom to move between the layers of the painting until a specific compositional unity is achieved. After completing this smaller series, I elected to use larger panels in the works that comprise my thesis series. The small canvases, though useful for exploring a variety of relationships and effects
quickly, did not seem appropriate to reflecting the murals and frescos of the Renaissance source material. However, with the shift from paper to wood the eccentricity of the edge had to be abandoned since cutting into the panels was difficult and did not seem to serve the work. To substitute for this effect, I continued to leave parts of the substrate bare, reasserting the reality of the wooden base and recapitulating the eccentric edge. I also altered my technique by selectively gessoing only a portion of the panel. This allowed for spaces where paint washes would interact differently creating other planes to work between. A final influence came in the early part of the semester from the painter Elizabeth Condon, whose works used poured paint and stains. Her technique inspired me to embrace the physicality of liquid paint as a counterpoint to the meticulously applied, taped patterns and collaged gestures. With these pieces of referential ‘vocabulary’ at hand, I combined these techniques to imagery based on my historical source material. The result is the works seen in the series.
CHAPTER 4

THESIS PAINTINGS

The works in this collection can be divided into 3 categories these being first the small series collected from various states of the research but sharing formal direction, the second being larger square paintings on panel and the final series being the most recent where the work has become sculptural. Following the completion of the Bento work and deciding to work in a larger format my attention turned to traditional collage and paint application more than sculptural devices. Later, addressing illusionistic space as a central theme led me to consider how the actual space surrounding the painting could also be used. By applying shaped pieces to the edges of the framing I was able to manipulate these spatial properties, while extending the compositional possibilities. As such the newest, most eccentric shaped works owe much of their development to the earliest, smallest compositions. Specific works from each division will be discussed in order to give an overview of the series as a whole.

The significant discoveries found in the small works series that were then employed in the larger works, were issues of paint application, spatial manipulation and collage. Beginning with the Bento series, I had been in the process of working with cut paper from my 30 hour review. In the process of looking for new ways to address painting, and building on my experience as a puppeteer making shadow puppets, I decided to investigate paper cutting as a new media. Researching artists such as Michael Velliquette (Fig. 19) and
Natasha Bowdoin (Fig. 20) led me to the realization of painting as only one component in my process and that cutting the image could also play a role. I was tired of feeling led by my process, reacting to what occurred rather than controlling the engagement. Cutting into the work directly, editing, layering and collaging, allowed me the control I needed. Looking for inspiration I was reminded of the work of an undergraduate classmate who had made meticulous, actual size painting of boxes of sushi from the grocery store. The arrangements of the food based on color and shape were compelling and familiar, looking like small art works. Through research I discovered the Japanese tradition of the bento box, a small lunch container ubiquitous to Japanese school children and adults alike. Elegant to kitschy, the boxes toy with food to create compositions as beautiful as they are appetizing. Incorporating this idea but substituting painted paper and boards for the food, the works were both painterly and sculptural and reflected Formalist aesthetics. The craftsmanship demanded by the pieces also slowed down my working method allowing me to spend more time making thoughtful, deliberate choices. Bento 1 (2013) (Fig. 21) began as a drizzle of paint, folded into a Rorshach blob, an experiment in automotism. The act also replicated the drizzling of tempura batter into hot oil creating free form decorations for boxes and plates of sushi. The square blob was then cut out and transferred to two other colors of paper so as to offset one on top of the other implying a shadow. These were placed off center from the base and an undulating light blue wave was painted to promote a sense of vibration, an effect
borrowed from a plate of Fugu (poisonous blowfish sushi). The palette was a split complementary Y/V/B but desaturated to subdue the color contrast in favor of the sculptural layering. Placing small pieces of board between the paper layers allows for a physical separation between the parts, even as the subtle color variations invite blending. The remainder of the paintings in the series followed the same processes drawing inspiration from food, patterns found in Stella’s works, as well as geometric patterns in tile surfaces from the Renaissance paintings. Color was chosen for its sensual quality as well as the way in which a juxtaposition of one hue advanced or receded against another. Often the best way to analyze something is to study what it is not. To move forward I decided to take what I had learned from *Bento* and change certain elements significantly to determine what was or was not actually important.

The series of paintings that followed were confined to a traditional rectilinear format without the benefit of manipulated edges or elevated pieces. This limitation allowed me to focus on paint application techniques and layering while incorporating elements of the new source material. Since the new inspiration was historical painting, and as flatness was a formal and literal issue, it seemed appropriate to confine the work to a traditional format. I chose works that had a strong figure ground relationship and specific architectural elements that I could draw from. The larger format also afforded me the opportunity to play with internal proportions and larger gestures in contrast to meticulous details. I began the first of this series, *Nativity* (2013) (Fig. 22) from an image by Pierro della
Francesca titled *Nativity* (1470-75) (Fig. 23). The image was intriguing for the sharp contrasts between the neutral ground and the black foliage and garments, which draw the eye in an oval pattern through the composition. The foliage, which one may expect to be green, suffered from oxidation, turning it black. Further damage can be seen in the figures to the right of the Virgin that have become interesting silhouettes without details. This contrast between the forms, and the architecture became the focus of my own work. I began with large gestures of amber glaze laid over a paler glaze of ochre to serve as the compositions foundation, while the architectural form was reduced to a white trapezoidal shape, echoing the shelter in the source image. Pale blue found in the negative spaces behind the structure imitate the ombre sky in the Pierro, underscoring the layers of space further. Considering that the gestural elements seemed to overwhelm the geometric, I applied a broad horizontal stripe to what would be the ‘wall’ of the architecture. This stabilized the energy of the mark making, reinforcing the middle ground space. Final collage elements of ink stained watercolor paper completed the composition, imitating the oxidized ‘foliage’, carrying the viewers eye from one end of the space to another. Within these ink ‘blobs’ there are touches of pure pthalo blue as a nod to the traditional blue of the Virgin. Two smaller works were produced concurrently, with *Nativity*, these being *Jacob’s Ladder* (Fig. 24) and *Cell* (Fig. 25). Aside from experiments in layering juicy glazes over and beside patterns, these paintings allowed for a further investigation of the paper collage. In *Jacob’s Ladder* the pink stairs are
collage, and in Cell it is the whitish cube. Cell also provided an opportunity to try
the use of semi-transparent glaze, and though the effect was successful, I cannot
say with certainty if I am comfortable at this time with the ambiguity it presents.

The next large work, which inspired several small studies, was Flagellation
(2013) (Fig.26), sourced from Pierro’s The Flagellation (1455) (Fig. 27). The work
is intriguing for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the defiance of
hieratic scaling, in that Jesus being tortured is neither the largest, nor central
aspect of the image. As can be seen in several of Piero’s works, at times it
seems that the mathematical trumps the spiritual, with the artist’s interest in
architectural rendering and classical proportion overwhelming the liturgical
intentions. I elected to borrow the proportions of the Piero Flagellation, and
decided to create a shallow space in the background, sandwiching the
expressive yellow gestures between a flat expanse of neutral grey and an
advancing geometric field, the pattern borrowed from within the far wall of the
Piero work. The final result captured the energy of the flagellation, the gestural
marks visualizing the event of a whipping, but coupled with a rigid mathematical
structure, forcing the two elements into an uneasy, but beautiful, tension. Also
within this work you will find a delicate mark that I elected to leave throughout the
entire editing processes. I found that this mark heightened the tension and added
a subtlety to the work, an effect I experimented with in a small series that
followed.

The series of three works titled Orange Structure (1,2,3 respectively) (2013)
were originally intended to incorporate line work within the geometric, gestural layers of the previous works, but instead became an experiment in Minimalism. Limiting myself to the fewest colors and movements I could make, the works were a reductive experiment to see how much could be done with the fewest components. Again the texture of the wood substrate is a critical element, as is its neutral color, and in *Structure 1* the collage of the orange stroke creates an effective foil to the meticulous hard edges of the stripes and the architectural void. *Structure 2* introduces an element of linear perspective and the third work, *Structure 3*, combines all of the elements with the addition of the drawn line. The reintroduction of drawing, begun in *Flagellation*, was a welcome addition to the body of works vocabulary. The line acted as a counterpoint to the visual weight of the broad painted gestures, the meticulous quality of the collage, and the finality of the geometry. I took this element into the last of the large canvases *Babylon* (2013) (Fig. 29), though admittedly much of the line work was consumed into the collage.

*Babylon* is inspired by several works from Lorenzetti and Piero, as well as Fra Angelico, who all employed a similar convention of rendering towns or cities in a skewed aerial view. In these works squares and rectangles are jumbled on top of each other with figures moving in front of the walls and through the rooms inside. In the painting I have inserted a dark geometric line that references a wall, or the edge of a space, but is then defied by the gestural line that compresses the layers, implying movement. A final choice of a semi transparent geometric
'tower' (an attempt to replicate the white smear in *Cell*) was added on the upper left, to counter the orange collaged line work in the lower right, providing a much needed resting space for the eye. Of the large works the balance between painted space and viewable wooden substrate is best in this work, and I would credit the experiments with the smaller works for this choice. Following the completion of this work and the smaller studies I was prepared to incorporate all of the techniques I had cultivated, which according to my process, meant another series of small panels.

In the final group of paintings in the thesis, I again began with a group of small works. Titled *LA, Apex* and *Jack Frost* (2013) (Fig. 30) the six inch square panels incorporated all of the elements of the previous works with the addition of liberal color and spray paint which was allowed to puddle and drip. The dripping of the spray inspired me to consider another method of paint manipulation, that of pouring, seen in Elizabeth Condon’s work but one that I had not considered before. Experiments with puddles poured on to glass, peeled off and then cut like paper were very successful and brought me full circle, back to the early collage experiments with painted paper. Adding this technique to my other methods allowed me a full range of motion throughout the making of an object. I felt that this discovery deserved new inspiration and sought works by later classical artists that had similar spatial, illusionistic concerns, and so began researching the work of Diego Velazquez.

Diego Velazquez (1599-1660) was a painter of the Spanish Golden Age,
under the reign of King Phillip IV. Though he is aligned with the Baroque period and primarily with portrait subject matter, his work has inspired numerous modern masters such as Sargent, Picasso, and Dali. Much of this inspiration stems from one work, *Las Meninas* (1656) (Fig. 31). This work referred to as “the theology of painting” depicts the eldest daughter of the new queen, Margaret Theresa and a retinue of ladies in waiting, playmates and guardians. But the artist himself is also in the picture, looking out of the left of the picture plane from behind his canvas, into our space, reflected in mirrors on the wall at the far end of the room, in the paintings lower right. The result is a peculiar work that inverts our experience as audience making us question what is being seen, and who is seeing it.\(^\text{15}\) This concern with the act of seeing and illusion aligned neatly with my own research and I began three new works based upon the masterpiece. In the same way that I selected critical elements from the Renaissance works, from this painting I began the painting *Diego* (2014) (Fig. 32) by repeating the geometry of the backwards canvas in the far left. I allowed the actual wood of the substrate to stand in for the illusion of a structure and then used flat areas of paint to suggest a further wall. Poured paint and collaged paper were then added to move between these spaces, suggesting the ambiguous experience present in *Las Meninas*. As in the *Orange Structure* series I limited myself to as few elements as were needed. Considering that Velazquez had used his own presence to affect the space beyond his work I wondered if there was a way for me to do the

\(^{15}\) Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt, Velazquez’s *Las Meninas* (New York: Cambridge University press, 2003), 1-14.
same. The wooden backing of the paintings allowed me to attach other panels, extending the composition and using the empty space beyond the picture plane in a similar manner as the *Bento* series. The panel unlike the paper had a rigid self supporting composition which did not require as much support underneath. I realized that small wood panels could be added, floating independent of the surface, but sharing a psychological space, which would allow me to push the issue of illusion even further. After *Diego* I considered this possibility of the fluctuating boundary of the paintings edge, applying it all of the final works, including *Breda* (Fig. 33), *Painting* (Fig. 34) and *Pavlova* (Fig. 35). But in keeping with what I had learned in the previous works, the only constant is change.

*Pavlova* is unique within the series for two particular reasons: it is the only work that includes wood veneer and it is the only work where the extended constructions overlap the surface (Fig. 36). Having questioned how nearly every aspect of the painting process could be deconstructed and converted into illusion, or material substitution, the one area left was the wooden substrate. I considered the French decorative painting technique of faux boise, or ‘fake wood’, and may still return to the idea, but instead found a piece of veneer. I looked for an opportunity to apply the veneer which had a subtle difference in grain and tone which would allow it not to blend too seamlessly, in keeping with a precedent of imperfection I had already set in previous works. An area of the painting that was previously striped in pastel tones after the addition of collage elements and poured paint was deemed too aggressive but not entirely unsuccessful. In
keeping with the ideas of ambiguity, a wooden panel was elevated over the space such that one could still see the striped area from the side and from a small portion that was left exposed. Continuing the pastel stripes with the wood veneer, set perpendicular to the grain of the substrate, allowed the important pattern element to continue, with only the suggestion of the offending color beneath. The veneer was also applied to the lower right of the composition in order to continue a delicate line and to subdue an overly aggressive painted edge. This use of one media to edit another without fully dissolving it is perhaps the most intriguing of the discoveries in Pavlova. Although some of the palette for the painting was suggested by the Velazquez works the relationship ends there. Pavlova among all of the thesis paintings is the best synthesis of the painting and construction vocabulary that I have been pursuing and represents the future of the works to follow.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I believe that it is critical for myself as an emerging artist and scholar to maintain a relationship to that which is current, as it would be foolish to ignore the role of history in shaping trends. The construction of this series, and the concomitant research, has provided me a contemporary apparatus for synthesizing inspiration, history and formal practice into an authentic art work. Though the series has borrowed significantly from the works of both Renaissance and 20th century masters, I feel confident that it is my own authentic vision. Aside from settling on a traditional approach to painting I have engaged with craft, structure and current theory to deconstruct historical inspiration and make it relevant to my contemporary experience and practice. By merging non traditional structures with traditional and experimental painting techniques the artwork suggests an ambivalent experience somewhere between the real and the simulated. The influence of technology is unavoidable today and throughout my research it has been important to me that I find a way to integrate my painting practice with what I observe in my daily life. In my own studio much of this research was conducted through the internet allowing me immediate access to vast amounts of scholarship and imagery regardless of space or time restrictions. As I observe people engaged in the virtual reality of the internet in their homes, cars, and work I am forced to ask how has this new communication technology has infected our lives and whether it is affecting our authentic human
experiences. This concern is unique to our period of human history. By combining historical and modern research with methods of application that reflect the flexible interchange between people and data, my images collapse past, present and future into a single event. Nothing is ever really deleted, and that which is new is only a product of what has come before it. My research will continue this investigation, engaging further with sculptural, layered possibilities and incorporating new, perhaps technological, media while striving to maintain a link to the authenticity of the painting craft and its history.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDICES

THESIS PAINTINGS

Pavlova – 2014, 32.75” x30.25”, acrylic and veneer on panel.

Nativity 2 (Pink Intersection) – 2014, 18”x18”, acrylic on panel.

Painting – 2014, 41.5”x36”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Rake’s Progress – 2014 17.5”x27 1/8”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Flagellation – 2013, 36”x36”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Diego – 2014, 39.5”x37”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Babylon – 2013, 36”x36”, acrylic and marker on paper, on panel.

Blue Babylon – 2013, 18 1/8”x17 7/8”, acrylic and pencil on panel.

Breda – 2014, 33” x 33 ¾”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Jacob’s Ladder – 2013, 24”x24”, acrylic and marker on paper, on panel.

SMALL WORKS

Bento 2 – 2013, 7”x7”, acrylic and paper with matte board on wood frame.

Snapshot – 2013, 6”x6”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Apex – 2013, 6”x6”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Chaan – 2013, 7.5”x8”, acrylic and paper on panel.
Surf – 2013, 6”x6”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Bento 5 (Fascinator) – 2013, 7.5”x6.25”, acrylic and matteboard with paper on wood frame.

Donna – 2013, 10”x10”, acrylic on panel on wooden frame.

Bento 1 – 2013, 7”x7.5”, acrylic on paper and matte board on wooden frame.

Bento 4 (Debussey) – 2013, 6.5”x6.5”, acrylic on paper and matte board on wooden frame.

Bento 3 – 2013, 7”x7.5”, acrylic on paper and matte board on wooden frame.

Eustace – 2013, 8.25”x8.5”, acrylic on paper and matte board on wooden frame.

Jack Frost – 2013, 6”x6”, acrylic and paper on panel.

LA - 2013, 6”x6”, acrylic and paper on panel.

Bento 7 – 2013, 4.5”x6.5”, acrylic on paper and matte board on wooden frame.
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Figure 5: della Francesca, Piero. *The Madonna and Child Attended by Four Angels*. 1460-1465. 42.5”x30.7”. Oil on wood. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

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Figure 8: Stella, Frank. *Wolfeboro IV*. 1966. 161”x99.8”. Flourescent alkyd and epoxy on canvas. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.
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Figure 10: della Francesca, Piero. *Polyptych of the Misericordia*. 1445-1462. 129.9”x107.5”. Oil and tempera on panel. Pinacoteca Comunale, Sansepolcro, Italy.

Figure 11: della Francesca, Piero. *Polyptych of Saint Anthony*. 1470. 133.1”x90.6”. Oil and tempera on panel. Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria, Perugia, Italy.
Figure 12: Stella, Frank. Chocorua 4. 1966. 120"x128"x4". Flourescent alkyd and epoxy on canvas. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover New Hampshire.

Figure 13: Stella, Frank. Hollis Frampton. 1963. 84"x84". Metallic alkyd on canvas. Mnuchin Gallery, Manhattan, New York.
Figure 14: Nozkowski, Thomas. *Untitled (7-61)*. 1995. 22”x30”. Oil on paper. Courtesy the artist and PaceWildenstein, Manhattan, New York.

Figure 15: Nozkowski, Thomas. *Untitled (P–13)*. 2012. 22”x30”. Oil on linen on panel. Courtesy the artist and PaceWildenstein, Manhattan,

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Figure 21: Foxx, Scott. *Bento 1*. 2013. 7”x7.5”. Acrylic and paper on board on wooden frame.
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Figure 27: della Francesca, Piero. *The Flagellation*. 1455. 23.2"x32.3". Oil and tempera on panel. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino, Italy.
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Figure 30: Foxx, Scott. *LA*. 2013. 6”x6”. Acrylic and paper on panel.

*Apex*. 2013. 6”x6”. Acrylic and paper on panel.

*Snapshot*. 2013. 6”x6”. Acrylic and paper on panel.
Figure 31: Velazquez, Diego. *Las Meninas*. 1656. 125”x109”. Oil on canvas. Museo Del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

Figure 32: Foxx, Scott. *Diego*. 2014. 39.5”x37”. Acrylic and paper on panel.
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Figure 34: Foxx, Scott. *Painting*. 2014. 41.5”x36”. Acrylic and paper on panel.
Figure 35: Foxx, Scott. *Pavlova*. 2014, 32.75”x30.25”. Acrylic and veneer on panel.

Figure 36: Foxx, Scott. Detail of *Pavlova*. 2014.