

THESIS
Masters of Fine Arts
Painting and Drawing
Amy Côté

mis-en-scène :

A French term, from the vocabulary of the theater denoting the totality of a play or film's visual style. Placement and movement of the camera and performers, décor, lighting: all that appears before the camera.¹

1. a : the arrangement of actors and scenery on a stage for a theatrical production b : stage setting
2. a : the physical setting of an action (as of a narrative or a motion picture) : context b. environment ²

My thesis exhibition plays with the proposition that two and three-dimensional work in conversation with each other in a gallery space can, with the collaboration of the viewer turn into a type of performance; that the presence and placement of the sculptures or “props” on the floor, on the paintings, in the corners, and on the wall, generates an environment for the viewer to interpret and choreographically navigate.

I ask myself the questions: How am I, as an artist, with the static mediums I work with, going to realize the power of a film or symphony upon the viewer's

¹ Robert Sklar, *Film: An International History of the Medium* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 32.

² Merriam-Webster online, s.v. “mis-en-scène,” *merriamwebster.com*, accessed on December 17, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mise-en-scene>.

consciousness. How am I going to find a way to structure the work to articulate all of my concerns, to successfully juxtapose images to create meaning and specifically discuss issues in contemporary society that cause fear and anxiety? How can I synthesize different mediums to create new forms, such as a hybrid of dance *and* painting?

Because of my early experience as a child living with a delusional parent whose stories created a fantastical but also violent, irrational world that permeated my psyche, I am particularly interested in non-linear and nonsensical narrative.

I go about finding source material by reading and thinking, writing lists of words or brief narratives that stimulate ideas, combing newspapers, the internet, galleries or museums for work and ideas that I can collaborate with, elaborate upon, or imaginatively collage together. I riff on my own past work, or scan, then print random images that intrigue me. I draw upon and appropriate from all these varying sources and use them as points of departure to create forms to use in my paintings. This includes vintage film grabs, turn of the century ballet costumes, old family photos, or anything that may have been forgotten or perhaps never noticed, like the corner of a room in a photograph that focuses on a group of people. My soft sculpture becomes a still life, taking on a new meaning when represented in a painting. The relationships between the images create their own meaning and narrative for each viewer becoming all a mash-up or re-mix of multi-layered ideas and discoveries. The work is a palimpsest where much is taken away, put back, and then something else put in its place; the subterranean images and colors

reverberate underneath the surface: a record of time that has passed.

For me the way I source material, and the free association and montage of the forms, are languages and structures I associate more with music, dance, and film than with painting or sculpture, per se.

“The exposition of ideas through fragments, though roving and disconnected, can better circumscribe its object than a more linear approach.”³ My work speaks in this way and invites the viewer to participate with his/her own narrative. A challenge for me is to incorporate concepts with processes and mediums that also reflect themes and content.

Embedded within the notion of the gallery as a stage for action and collaborative theater, is my interest in the current experimentation with animals and DNA manipulation known as transgenics . The neon colors reference biological advances in imaging and the break-down of cells with outcomes that have produced “glowing monkeys⁴” and pink rabbits: thus my painting *Frankenstein’s Cat*. The bananas are a fantastical example of GMO gone awry, all issues that are part of bio-tech advances.⁵ Even though these are issues that create anxiety (and possibly

³ Nicolas. Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lucas & Sternberg & Eichenbaum, 2002), 8.

⁴ Alexis Madrigal, “Glowing Monkeys make more glowing Monkeys the Old Fashioned Way,” *Wired*, May 27, 2009, <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2009/05/glowing-monkeys-make-more-glowing-monkeys-the-old-fashioned-way/>.

⁵ Emily Anthes, *Frankenstein’s Cat* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 5.

anger), I approach them with humor. My sensibilities are in sympathy with the clumsy props and *mis-en-scènes* of early science fiction films⁶ and the styles of juvenile fiction. I believe that all that has been imagined, things like outer space travel, time warp, hybrid creatures and totally re-constructed cyborg humans will all be part of our future.

I have researched and am very interested in the advent of advancing transgenics, de-extinction, cloning and intuitive robotics, all of which are blurring the line that exists between animal/human, machine/human relationships. I explore altered states of consciousness and how the subconscious entwines with these new realities. I believe it is important to be aware of the issues of our times that are in their infancy or are yet untried, that cause us all anxiety. I approach with humor, empathy and playfulness the feelings we have about the velocity of technological and biological changes.

In this current body of work, I use both acrylics and oil paint on canvas and create fabric works, stuffed with fiberfill, which are sewn by hand or by machine and then painted. Some still have the original pattern. I deliberately chose flannel as a fabric to reference dreaming and altered states of consciousness that I believe intersect with both film and music. I use found objects such as a snow fence from the side of a highway to create a car sculpture; a cardboard box becomes an animal, doll's clothing found in a trash bin becomes part of a drawing installation.

⁶ Georges Méliès, "A Trip to the Moon / Le Voyage Dans La Lune - 1902," *YouTube*, July 24 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lDa00w0MEE>.

In general, I try to challenge myself with variations in scale and unusual combinations of color and make objects that read as if they are created from another material, a material that will momentarily perplex the viewer. I use color bright color like a major key in music, to bring in an uplifting mood. I search for *stimmung* or perfect pitch while attempting to make work that resists interpretation. I think painting and composing a piece of improvisational music can be synonymous, although the spontaneity of improvisation eventually becomes more controlled as ideas materialize in paint, form, sculpture, line, etc.

I give personality to my sculptures which originate as banal domestic objects (such as fruit or stuffed animals) that I morph in replication. The sculptures can function in conjunction with the paintings, drawings, other sculptures, or may stand alone. I proceed intuitively as I deconstruct and reconstruct scenarios. I'm focused on inviting and creating collaborative opportunities both physically and imaginatively with the viewer while mining an amalgamation of experience, suppressed emotions, and fears. In short, I use visual stream of consciousness and montage as my primary techniques. The following paragraph by Walter Mosely models feelings I am challenged to visually create:

I came half awake, dead and dreaming. My eyes were open but I couldn't focus on anything because I was still falling, as if the nightmare had followed me from sleep into the waking world. I didn't know where I was or where I'd come from. But the bed under me was turning and falling and I, I was sure, had perished. This sensation was so real, so palpable, that I closed my eyes and moaned. The movement of the bed then took on a temporal quality; instead of falling I'd become unmoored in time: traveling backward and then forward through a life that was mine and yet,

at the same time, foreign to me.⁷

Walter Mosely: *Little Green*

In the past my work addressed memories, personal narratives and loss which involved consulting family photos from scrapbooks or iconic photographs from historic and sociological events, such as the Civil Rights March. I tackled the issues present in the time period of the photograph (racial injustices or misogyny) that are still very much a part of our world, and certainly very much a part of my history. From these sources I would create small paintings and portraits. I also riffed on Old Masters, like Caravaggio or Vermeer, using their compositions as under-paintings.

But in my current work I am less concerned about the past and more concerned about the future. My work addresses issues such as DNA mixing and genetically altering food. I am also questioning life or energy existing on different planes or in different forms, in a parallel universe, or in other states of consciousness. I often address the irrational with disconnected images, and when these images are presented in a storyboard form, they create associative meaning.

I have spent time watching vintage films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, directed by Robert Wiene, *Un Chien Andalou*, by Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali, *Trip to the Moon* by Georges Méliès as well as screen grabs from 1950's monster movies which were made in response to the horrors of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima. These works have piqued my interest in the artistry of analog *mis-en-scene* and

⁷ Walter Mosely, *Little Green* (New York: Doubleday, 2013), 1.

hand-made film props, as well as in the subterranean archetype of the monster that plays various roles in our collective unconscious. These films interest me because they are a hybrid art form that falls somewhere between theater and film. I admire the work of Pina Bausch and her Tanztheater Wuppertal⁸ and her expressionistic combining of props, theater, costume and dance to create an original, free associative multi-media art form. Nick Cave accomplishes this as well with his Sound Suits⁹ that are a combination of sculpture, painting, music and dance. I am also interested in the use of the body as a tool for visual expression. For example, I am excited by Anne Teresa, Baroness De Keersmaeker's sand dances¹⁰ that reference action painting with the use of rhythmic pattern and the body as paintbrush.

Harold Rosenberg writes in *The American Action Painters*¹¹:

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer

⁸ Pina Bausch, "Cafe Müller," *YouTube*, November 11, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEQGYs3d5Ys>.

⁹ Nick Cave. "Art in Motion," *YouTube*, January 25, 2008, www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwupTQt9zxY.

¹⁰ Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, "Maison Martin Margiela with H&M - Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker," *YouTube*, November 12, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaEYDDTNIWQ>.

¹¹ Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Ann Norcross*, accessed December 2013, <http://myhomepage.ferris.edu/~norcross/ModernArtWebsite/Pages/ArticleLinks/rosenbergActionPtg.pdf>.

approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.

I also believe that painting is a dramatic event. But for me it is also a memoir improvised by the painter over time that allows images to appear or to be found rather than planned. Thus in my work I combine the accidental finding of imagery with planned drawing. I challenge myself to blend both approaches in my painting process.

The *Poetics of Space*:¹² by Gaston Bachelard has also informed me encouraging me consider the different kinds of space we inhabit, whether intimate, secretive, poetic or public. My work strives for poetry, but it also evokes fluid psychological landscapes that I want the public to view. I admire the way Julie Taymor's combines puppetry with theater and costume, James Ensor and Francis Bacon for the weirdness in their paintings, Stephen Mueller's painterly celestial symbolism, and Jean Michel Basquiat's his ability to create large, expressive works with a limited but vibrant color palette. I also love the paintings of Alice Neel and the sculptures of Louise Bourgeois. Two young painters whose work I admire are Carlos Donjuan and Tomokazu Matsuyama because they both combine pattern, color, and accidents very successfully. (Something I aspire to do.) My work, I've been told, reminds people of Saya Woolfalk's multi-media, collaborative amalgamations about

¹² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964), 75.

place as “No-Place,”¹³ which addresses racial and global multiplicities while tapping into childhood fantasies. I also feel an affinity with Mike Kelly whose retrospective I recently saw at MoMA PS1, the bulk of which examines sub-cultures and Pop culture. His comments resonate with me.

“I’m an avant-gardist. We’re living in the postmodern age, the death of the avant-garde. So, all I can really do now is work with this dominant culture and flay it, rip it apart, reconfigure it, expose it — because popular culture is really invisible. People are really visually illiterate. They learn to read in school, but they don’t learn to decode images.”¹⁴

I am working toward installing my thesis show in a local music club with large walls, where the audience, the space and the musicians will become *part* of the installation. I would also be happy to have my work shown in galleries, libraries, or any other space that reaches the general public. I can imagine my work being outdoors (although I would have to find media that can weather the elements). I would also like to collaborate with an outdoor theater piece.

I am a populist and I particularly want my artwork to be shown to artists as well as non-artists and people of many different ages. It is important to me to show in places where people would not normally expect it to see my kind of artwork, particularly a young audience.

¹³ Saya Woolfalk, “Saya Woolfalk,” *sayawoolfalk.com*, 2007, <http://www.sayawoolfalk.com/>.

¹⁴ Randy Kennedy, “A Maverick as Student and Teacher,” *International New York Times*, accessed October 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/13/arts/design/a-mike-kelley-retrospective-fills-moma-ps1.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1388506501-vZ4dmtEek7HKTkGYd8JmBA>.

In conclusion, I recognize that the world is becoming hybridized, as is art. A recent show, *The Language of Painting* curated by Carol Salmanson at the Lesley Heller Workspace in New York City¹⁵ consisted of work that addressed light, line, form, and color, yet hardly any of the artists used paint in their work. I'm interested in stretching these boundaries with my own work and incorporating the language of other disciplines in my installations and in my future paintings.

¹⁵ Lesley Heller, "The Language of Painting," *Lesley Heller Workspace*, October 2013, <http://www.lesleyheller.com/exhibitions/20131018-the-language-of-painting-curated-by-carol-salmanson>.

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