

Brackett Creek Exhibitions is pleased to present our Summer 2024 group exhibition: *Open Your Eyes Space Is Not Poluted Until People From Earth Gets There This Is The Greatest Place Earth If You Keep On Destroying It Really Bad Taste There Is So Meny Lies You Never Know If There Is The Truth Or Is It A Lie*. The exhibition runs from June 29 - August 31, 2024 at Artist Hand, Brackett Creek Exhibitions in Bozeman, Montana.

The title of the exhibition comes from a work by Joseph "Count Slima" Williams. His poem on paper was recreated as a mural at Brackett Creek Exhibitions as part of the show.

In lieu of a formal press release we have asked each artist to complete a questionnaire, answered as follows:

Cortney Andrews

How did (title of work) come to be? Did it grow out of another work or in response to another work?

This particular work, *Creep*, came about during the pandemic, when my weekly rehearsals with my performers were nearly the only group social activity any of us had outside of our homes - so the feeling of being trapped was very real. On top of that, I was in a relationship where I was manipulated, controlled and highly monitored (by a psychoanalyst, no less); it took me years to disentangle myself.

The narrative of the work became: the performers are willingly offering themselves, placing themselves in this dangerous scenario where they are vulnerable to another person. They don't struggle and they are not directly "shot" with the staple gun, but the effects of the power imbalance are implicit.

The chairs beneath them are removed and they are left hanging, literally by threads.

But gradually, painfully yet elegantly, they are released from the grips...only to repeat the process again, switching roles as the perpetrator or the "victim". It's a very Freudian cycle, one that most people can relate to. There is an absurd quality to it because of that familiarity, which I embrace.

I often write about my associations related to the work to tease out the threads woven into it subconsciously. I'm also very inspired by all kinds of music, which is always embedded in the rehearsal process. I grew up immersed in 90s music, and during that time there many *Creep* titles- the TLC song (amazing), Stone Temple Pilots (also great), and Radiohead (unfortunately the most well-known). Why so many *Creeps* in the 90s? For this work, I'd rather the associations be more abstract - is it a verb or a noun?

What's the relationship between your work and dance, performance, video, installation? Is there a hierarchy for you?

All these practices began overlapping the more I focused on the performing body and its anxiety, pleasure or disengagement in the world. I'm only reminded that it's unusual when people ask - "Well, is it performance, or is it video?" It can be both, and it is both - with adjustments, of course. There are changes to the location, apparatus and the viewing experiences, but I think of these adaptations as a benefit, not a deficit.

In fact, these modes of engagement - live performance; viewing in a gallery; watching on your phone/laptop; witnessing something on the street; or watching in a darkened theater - these are all very different ways we engage with art regularly. Is it a collective experience with a group, or are you alone? Or maybe you are physically present, but completely disengaged from what's happening.

It's interesting because I think social media has really shaped how we desire, communicate, and consume knowledge and how we understand one another. On these platforms I find that the more one-dimensional something or someone appears, the more successful it is- it's easy to digest, and just as

easy to forget. Perhaps because it facilitates my natural inclination toward dissociating, that I have such resistance -- it feels too easy, and I don't want my work to be easy. The challenge for me is integrating disparate things together, and not just media like video, dance and photography, but also physical and emotional incongruities.

I remember reading this Rachel Kushner interview a while back where she said: "*Just think about the parts of your life. How do we account for own contradictions? The only way to understand them is to let them exist, as truths that indicate something about character. People are built of elements that don't fit together—and the conflict of that is their essential drive, probably!*" I agree.

Mia Ardito

Tell us about *The Showers*. What takes place in *The Showers*?

The Showers is a fountain made from an upside-down Italian glass and steel chandelier, that drips water from the where the light bulbs once were, into a blue tiled basin. In the world of Peninsula Island, *The Showers* is a communal shower for Barbie-sized bathers, eight shower heads in all, dripping water continuously. This co-ed outdoor shower is off to the side of the swimming pool where no privacy is afforded the bathers. It is a set for a scene of eight female barbies scrubbing up. They are all in bikinis, covered in wet paint splotches of bright colors. There has just been a competition where contestants read aloud something another cast member has said about them behind their back. They throw a glass of colored watery paint on the contestant they think said it. The game is designed to humiliate and destabilize the couples and friendships that have been forming in the House of Love. The "strongest couple" has just heard horrible things coming from something her partner said about her, its bad but out of context and before they kissed, it sounds so bad. So, she is fuming and heads to the shower with all the girls. The musical scene begins when she starts singing "I'm gonna wash that man right outa my hair" from the 1958 musical South Pacific. All the characters get involved in the musical number, sudsey and singing, including the disgruntled partner.

https://youtu.be/qr3wH4u4xus?si=9A0bIY0sX2tf0fw_

Why water features?

I like to include water and lighting features in my sculptures because I think they add the element of time. The electronic lights and water pumps tie into the fact that the environments are miniature sets for videos. They are not stagnant but kinetic, existing in time as it passes, just before or after something has happened. The water and the lights are contingent on action, turning on, filling up, and therefore contain narrative. The water in the pump, spitting and sucking and spitting out again, tells the story of itself.

Can you talk about scale in your work?

I am slowly (trying to) read this book "On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, The gigantic, the souvenir, the Collection" by Susan Stewart. Perhaps I love miniatures because you can hold both interior and exterior in your gaze at the same time; a greater vantage point and perspective to observe the whole and understand it. Miniatures are the physical act of zooming out. I am interested in dolls and miniatures because they are the physical embodiment of fiction, inanimate mimetic objects that fiction can be imposed on. Playing with dolls is a starting off point for storytelling, and storytelling is a way to process the world. "The desire to animate the toy is the desire not simply to know everything but to experience everything simultaneously." Zooming in and zooming out.

Robert Kieswetter

What are you calling these new paintings?

Not sure if there's an umbrella term for these...at least not yet. The Grilles I showed last summer are, in one sense, a plastic manifestation of a mindfulness practice. The individual works are linked by a shared

pictographic “mantra”: the grid, that can as a sort of decoder ring for a visual language. To keep using language as the analogy... if the Grilles are something akin to haiku, perhaps these new paintings are approaching prose.

Talk about the horizon in these paintings vs. the grids in other paintings you have made.

The horizon may be a vestigial echo of the grid, though I hadn't considered that until you asked. The orientation of the picture plane lends some kinetic energy or provides some hydrodynamic value that I like. The horizon provides an anchor, or at least a keel in time and space. They aren't “landscape” paintings in a literal sense, as they don't seek to represent a place, real or imagined, but I like the potential evocation.

Where did this title come from?

As per usual, the title's rooted in, but exploded from an inside joke. Rob Nasty -> Crocodile Crazy. Loco, in this context is value-neutral, or maybe leans chaotic good.

Also, formally, the title has a rhythmic phonetic quality that I like, almost like a bouncing object coming to rest. Loco, in this context is value-neutral, or maybe leans chaotic good.

William D. Lewis

Can you tell us about this series of work and how it came about?

"The Long View" is from a series I call *Acts of Painting*. I used various modes (such as satire, black comedy, expressionism, etc.) to address conceptions (and what I regard as misconceptions) about painting, especially life in the studio.

How has teaching affected your work and time in your studio?

It goes without saying that teaching public school is challenging and time consuming and, would likely interfere with a painting practice. However, and of all the jobs that I have had (including being an artist's assistant) teaching has more consistently invigorated and inspired my practice. Being around young people reminds me of the imperative of keeping the art spirit alive.

What's the "best" exhibition you've seen?

What an impossible question! So many exhibitions have had a profound impact on how I see the world. I will mention a couple experiences that were exactly what I needed at the time.

I was probably a freshman in high school when, on the advice of a friend of my great aunt, I went to the National Gallery to see an exhibition of Dutch painting of the Golden Age. I was spellbound by the space, light, characters, etc. and the experience confirmed for me my resolve to be a painter.

After graduating high school, I knocked around Europe for a few months. I would characterize my mental state while in the south of France as a trance. Both the Foundation Maeght and the Matisse Chapel in St Paul de Vence seemed the ultimate marriage of art, architecture and setting and have stayed with me since.

Cristina Marian

Tell us the story of *The Sounds Around*:

The Sounds Around was made near the end of my seven-month residency at Aunt Dofe's Gallery in Willow Creek. As I started a new piece of work, a storm came abruptly. My studio was without windows, but outside, I could hear the changing rhythm of the falling rain, the wind- whipped branches, and the echoes of the old building that I was in. I started replicating these on canvas as they happened with the charcoal, gesso, and water that were handy - gestures imitating the splashes of mud on the sidewalk as they appeared in my mind. I recorded the surrounding movements and sounds, all as my baby kicked inside of me.

I was in the last few months of my pregnancy and moving into the unknown. About to become a mother and moving to a new town, my life was chaotic and unbeknownst to me, about to change radically. My work reflected this. I set the painting aside for a few days, unsure of how to finish. The architectural element soon appeared, and it helped to contain the disorder and tumult.

Can you talk about your previous work as an illustrator and how it relates to the paintings you make currently?

I made children's illustrations for eleven years, imagining my stories while painting on glass, wood, and even murals in nursery rooms. I also worked with children, teaching art classes. Sharing stories was at the base of everything I did. The narratives that developed in my work were influenced by the daily interactions and conversations I had with the children and adults around me. My intention was to reconnect with my childhood. This was a response, or maybe I should call it a reaction to the events I encountered; I was longing for my objects, house, animals, and the entire childhood life I lost in a fire that destroyed everything. Building and illustrating stories in paintings was a counterattack to a complicated present. Attention to detail and craftsmanship were essential aspects of my work during this period.

Today, my work reflects the moment in which I live - events we've all experienced, such as the pandemic, rapid changes in our neighborhoods, etc., and personal occurrences that have shaped me in unexpected ways. In comparison to my previous work, this response is immediate, abstract, gestural, and deeply personal. The paintings develop via impulse, intuition, improvisation, excitement, and the unknown. They respond to the material I'm working with—a continuous circuit of research and discovery. There is no linear narrative anymore. The story's narrative often appears towards the end by introducing recognizable elements into the painting, or in the titles of my paintings.

How has living in Montana changed or defined your painting practice, if at all?

After moving to the U.S., the imaginative, narrative elements of my previous work were gradually replaced by ones inspired by reality. The nostalgia for times and things that didn't exist anymore, that kept me grounded and offered a much-needed emotional equilibrium, were no longer present. This place, its language and habits, everything that surrounded me, was so different. I found that I wanted to keep my eyes open and be fully present in this new world. I looked at all that was new and did my best to listen, process, adopt, adapt, and integrate. I came to see my past through new eyes.

The results are in the paintings and drawings that I make today. In my studio, the work is composed of multiple elements that pass through different stages - a liminal journey before becoming one composite piece. When not operating with a clear plan or a script to follow, the building process itself is marked by disorientation – a frustrating but exciting and fertile phase before arriving at the final state. I use a de-collage technique, a tearing down action that can be related to the separation, isolation and negotiation that occurs in transitional times like the ones I've lived. The stories are fluid with one moment merging into another.

Cait Porter

How do you start a painting, and when do you know it's done?

I start a painting by blocking in the entire composition with a thin layer of paint. Sometimes a painting will happen quickly, and I'll know it's done after the second pass. Some paintings can give me more trouble than others, and I can lose focus of what the end actually is if I'm not careful. I can start obsessing and trying to fix things that don't actually need my attention. My brain will start to tell me that the painting is bad or that it will never be finished. Over the years I've learned how to take a break, pause to stop my intrusive thoughts, and to turn the painting around for a day. Then when I return the painting I can usually tell on the first glance if there is an area I need to go back into or if the painting is done.

How do you think about and/or navigate negative space with your work?

When I first started painting, I considered myself to be an abstract painter. I was constantly questioning and inverting positive and negative space within my abstract compositions. I still do this in my paintings today. When I'm making a painting of a flower, for example, I start with the flower as the positive space and the cast shadow and wall as the negative space. Then when I switch to work on the wall and the shadow I try to think of that area as the positive space. I will keep moving back and forth in this way. This keeps me moving between abstraction and representation within the overall composition.

Have your paintings changed your domestic space & life?

I think my paintings have allowed me to articulate what I've always seen and felt within my domestic spaces. A cast iron pan, a laptop propped up in bed, or a cup of tea can be easily taken for granted, but they also have the potential to absorb the weight of human experience. These household objects are silent observers—captive audience members to realities of anxiety or depression, deep loss and heartbreaking beauty. The space between the rungs of a dish rack with an empty White Claw can suggest a silent experience of struggle, loneliness and isolation. Painting has definitely changed my life for the better—I feel grateful to have found a way to articulate these thoughts and feelings in a visual way that brings meaning and purpose to my life. And hopefully this resonates with viewers as well.

Kathryn W. Schmidt

What sustains you, as an artist? What makes you keep going back to the studio?

What sustains me and my studio practice is that I feel like it is maybe the best part of myself. I love books and reading but am not a writer or a speaker, so being able to look back and see an increasing body of work that I feel good about and having found a particular language that expresses something about me and my concerns is satisfying and nourishing. Having this kind of eye and particular lens makes traveling and learning about the world that much richer. And, too, I appreciate the feeling of being part of a 40,000-year continuum of people making things.

The skeletons in your paintings are so active, so they don't necessarily feel like a memento mori. Why skeletons?

There was a period when the work was more strictly about climate change and I was working with Citizen's Climate Lobby. The paintings you refer to are called "They Were Kings and Queens" and "West of Everything" and show us in a future form, without skin, even, and traveling to new places. Both show rather confident figures, as Americans tend to be, though we mostly still refuse to acknowledge and take responsibility for what we are doing to the earth we depend on.

What is it in a broad sense that you hope to capture with a painting?

I have never made representations of the Montana landscape, much as I am in awe of its power and beauty. Instead, I register an emotional take on our lives as human beings, which often is shown by a figure or figures in a landscape, almost like an actor with a stage-like backdrop. I am drawn to exploring our common traits as humans, which haven't changed much over the many years. E.O. Wilson's quote about our slow human evolution says it best: "We have created a Star Wars civilization, with Stone Age emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology."

What is your relationship to the nature vs. the controlled space of the studio, after living for so long in Montana?

Though I have loved living in big cities, I know that I would find it hard to live elsewhere at this point, appreciating as I do living surrounded by nature and with a miles-long view. While I am somewhat embarrassed to admit I can't name all the plants, birds and animals that surround me, I am deeply aware

of what it means to live through the changes in seasons and years in a particular landscape. Just watching the changing light and weather over the landscape is a particular pleasure and balm. Also, I think “standing back” as I do helps me have the long view that artists can have, often not being part of the regular economy and maybe just having day jobs, as they say. Having that separation is essential for holding onto one’s train of thought and for having the situation in which ideas can emerge and come together.

I know that I only develop new ideas, new work when I am actually in my studio, so I always say Montana is a good place to make art (but hard to have a career in). For example, people had asked if I was inspired to paint during a 3-month trip up through central America 8 years ago or so, Panama to Guatemala. Instead, I didn’t touch a paint brush or pencil in that time, and that was typical. I was drawn into lots of things that I was seeing - politics, mostly, in that case - but I can’t take advantage of new things in my paintings immediately. Instead, when I am searching for a way to start a next painting, I page through my notebooks where I keep lists of possibilities and some painted or drawn image ideas and look at books of favorite artists, maybe read some poetry. I much prefer to already have in mind how to start a next piece, which helps power through that sometimes tricky last part of a painting, making last revisions and deciding when to stop.

J.P. Spencer

**Can you tell us about this work? And how long or how many lives it has lived?
When do you know a painting is complete?
What sorts of themes do you work with? Your paintings seem to have very distinct categories.
What would you call the series that this piece is from?
How are your spiritual or religious beliefs reflected in your work?
Is art a form of spiritual practice, a daily practice?**

JP gave me an essay he wrote as an answer to some of these questions:

Returning to the Golden Age Art
By Pennell Spencer

Today we realize that the artists of the future must continue where the Giant Masters such as Reubens, Giorgione, Titian, Bellini, Raphael, Tintoretto, Paolo Veronese, Michelangelo, Da Vinci and Rembrandt left off.

We must return, as Kenyon Cox, the Art Critic, might say, to the Classic spirit, gaining and manifesting perfection on canvas as a glorious representation of life’s essence.

The old conditions of art must be restored and continued, beginning with the Great Heroic artists as our nearest source of authentic tradition, and moving on from that point of greatest spiritual achievement in the arts. We must rise to even higher states of consciousness and bring them shining through our art, rising once again to influence the consciousness of mankind with higher ideal aspirations.

My goal in this direction is to rejuvenate tradition, vitalize it and turn it to newer and higher uses; to gain new knowledge, and yet to capture and crystalize it in forms reminiscent of the most celestial forms of the past.

In studying the great master’s work, you behind to feel that holy perfection underlying the detailed study of every aspect of their execution of art.

This is our beautiful aim and goal, to bring forth into this world of form reflections of God, of the spirit, co-creating with the Presence of God all the glories of the heavenly octaves.

The art of the Great Masters must be evolved to higher and even still higher levels of consciousness emanating from the heavenly realms.

Realizing that unpopularity with the masses is indeed no proof of greatness, artists should never compete.

We must return to the God flame of perfection and eternal love in the arts, and train and discipline ourselves to manifest that love and perfection.

To restore that transcendent beauty of which we speak to the arts, we must respect tradition and submit to its disciplines and rigors of self-control.

We must get back to what's Eternal and Real, we must return to the Holy Spirit. Painting is Art and the Divine Science of the Geometrization of Divinity within all who perceive and partake of that art form. Art is to great a beautiful surface, beautifully divided into interesting shapes, enlivened with noble lines, varied with lovely and harmonious colors.

Art is to uplift the consciousness into higher and more beautiful levels of awareness.

To truly be an artist is to be one with all that I AM.

The Golden Age is dawning. Painting, as a method of lifting mankind's consciousness to a higher state of realization must become fully realized.

Continuing where the Great Masters have ended, we must begin. These individuals were endowed with a drive to co-create with God through paint, colors, understanding and training for success.

Reubens, Giorgione, Titian, Bellini, Raphael, Tintoretto, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, DaVinci are considered a sample of some of those Great Masters whom we can learn from and imitate.

We must gain and manifest perfection on canvas and in our lives, to out-picture beauty and divinity for the upliftment of all life.

A painting's sovereignty must be absolute and complete.

Because America, a new nation under God is formed of a new people, the new art with imperishable colors spoken of by the Wonderman of Europe, the Comte de St. Germain, will be brought forth with transcendent beauty in America.

We must return to composition and the monumental style. We must once again attempt purity and beauty of color and form in Life (nature) and demonstrate once again the God in Man.

We must return to old technical methods, under painting in tempera, and using glazes. All of these things must be done to bring in the Golden Age Art, which is our goal.

To patronize art is to do it justice.

We shall strive for perfection, recognizing that perfection is only attained through discipline and self-control.

We must not seek for the new, but what is good and true.

We must not seek for what is easy and attractive, but what is Eternal and Real.

Nobility equals Genius and Emulation of that Genius.

Hard work, study and divine inspiration equals Great Art.

Some day we shall establish a great school of painting in America the Beautiful.

We must be sincere and loyal to this cause and high purpose: to bring forth Beauty, Love and Truth.

I AM Sincere
I AM loyal to this cause
I AM High Purpose
I AM Beauty
I AM Love
I AM Truth

Art is a language, and this language expresses the Ideas and Visions of the inner soul.

To paint, to draw—all ART is to express thyself as Thou Truly Art, through art founded on natural laws—on the laws of pure and undefiled vision and perception and composition.

The study of natural light and design is also very important.

We must seek out the guiding principles upon which the great artists built and brought forth, which caused the most beautiful paintings that exist! We must steep ourselves in tradition, and then set one's self to invent new forms which shall be guided by the eternal principles contained within the boundaries of the old. The only true way to study design is to follow the perfect designs of the Great Designer of the Universe and those who repeat those glorious patterns throughout their artistic creations.

Joseph "Count Slima" Williams

Do you come up with the poems beforehand, or do they evolve as you are stenciling?

Slima said he plans the poems beforehand but may make adjustments while stenciling. Sometimes, you can spot the direct changes with erasure marks and even the ghost of stenciled words.

When did you first start making these series of works?

In the mid 1980's when he started working at Charas.

What is your relationship to music? The works are very lyrical, and I've heard you sing every word at the jukebox at Josies Bar!

He mentioned his love for 1950s rock and roll. He doesn't listen to music while writing poetry, but he enjoys the jukebox at Sophie's. The poems aren't directly inspired by music, but there are themes that one can connect from them to 1950s rock and roll—summertime, ladies, evenings, and lifestyle.