

Resurrection

by

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Barbara Walton
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Andrew Wyeth, Albrecht Dürer, and Rembrandt. All three of these guys are better than I am and never wrote a thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Growing up on a farm that has been in my family since 1849, I gained an admiration and reverence for the land that so many of my family members have worked. Like ghosts or spirits that walk the place, monument-like markers exist, signifying the actions and lives of those who came before me. A tractor may remain parked as it has been for years since the last time it was driven. A broken crock full of metal now slowly sinks into the earth under years of maple leaves fallen from the massive trees that my grandfather planted when he was six years old. A winter-killed field of grass frosted with a light snow cracks like eggshells under my chore boots. And a dead cow lies in a pasture to be consumed by scavengers of all species. I find stories on my family's farm, and I record, document, and preserve them almost obsessively in my detailed graphite drawings and mixed-media acrylic paintings. My paintings begin with detailed underdrawings that often remain visible in the final painting. The underdrawings provide a visible structure or armature like bones on the body or the vaulting in a Gothic church. I create these mixed-media acrylic paintings using watered-down acrylic, acrylic ink, and handmade acrylic paints using natural pigments applied in multiple thin washes and using detailed, woven mark making. However, it is not so much the people or even the places as it is the opportunity within each painting or drawing to capture something timeless—something that would have been true yesterday or ten thousand years ago.

I consider my method of using underdrawings to have precedent in the techniques of Northern European artists from the 15th and early 16th century such as Robert Campin, Hans Memling, and Albrecht Dürer. Underdrawings are drawings done on panel, canvas, paper, or other substrate that assist in resolving compositional issues before the artist

starts painting. Later painters took inspiration from these historical models in terms of both subject matter and working method and would apply concepts gleaned from these artists. One painter who did this Iowa native Grant Wood. The combination and juxtaposition of Regionalism, with its emphasis upon a particular rural venue, and the paradoxical mystery of Surrealism form the aesthetic precedent that is the basis of my artwork. I enjoy painting every blade of grass while allowing a disconcerting ambiguity to lurk below the surface to encourage viewers into a deeper dialogue with the paintings. I strive to find the sublime in the mundane that permeates each life to preserve and portray that for the future. An entire world is portrayed within the individual lines

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: ARTISTIC BACKGROUND

Art, like history, is a river, where eddies and currents influence our present state. All artists are influenced positively or negatively by everything they see, hear, or experience on their journey through life. By tracing our development backward, we can get a more accurate



Figure 1: Jae Lee, Graphite Illustration from Stephen King's *Dark Tower*.

and interesting idea of where we came from and why we are who we are. My journey in art started not in fine art but in contemporary graphic novels. That medium filtered my approach to fine art.

1. Around age ten, I started reading comic books. I read much of the original *Spiderman* as illustrated by Steve Ditko and the reinvention of *Spiderman* by Mark Bagley.

My interest in comics began with appreciation of the stories, the adventure, and the drama: "Will Peter Parker ever meet that mysterious redhead Aunt May is

trying to hook him up with? Find out in next month's issue!" I became absorbed in the images and neglected the words and stories. Once, I studied images in one graphic novel for

an entire year without even reading the story. When I read the story, I was disappointed, as it paled beside the story I had woven for the characters!

Comics is a drawing-based process: a penciler like Jack Kirby draws onto a piece of paper in pencil; then an inker such as Mike Royer enhances that drawing with ink to enable a digital scan for the final version. Finally, letters and color are added to the background of the finished work. At the core, though, graphite remains the medium in which each individual comic begins its life. Later graphic novelists I studied included Andy Kubert and Jae Lee, illustrated their stories in a technique called *enhanced penciling*. In this procedure, a more finished graphite drawing is completed, contrast adjusted, and used as the final art to be incorporated with a background that is digitally painted as the final form. The sketchiness bonded with my DNA as I studied these detailed illustrations.

Most of my favorite artists in my formative years were from the Silver Age of comics, 1956 to 1970, and predominantly worked for Marvel Comics.

In the 1970s, comics were reconsidered, influenced by cinematic style and film methods. Unlike film which by nature of the technology was limited to specific formats, the graphic novel was free to explore panels of varied size and shape to challenge the storytelling format. One of the artists who first realized the opportunities of graphic novels for this storytelling format was Frank Miller. I discovered Frank Miller's *Daredevil* and

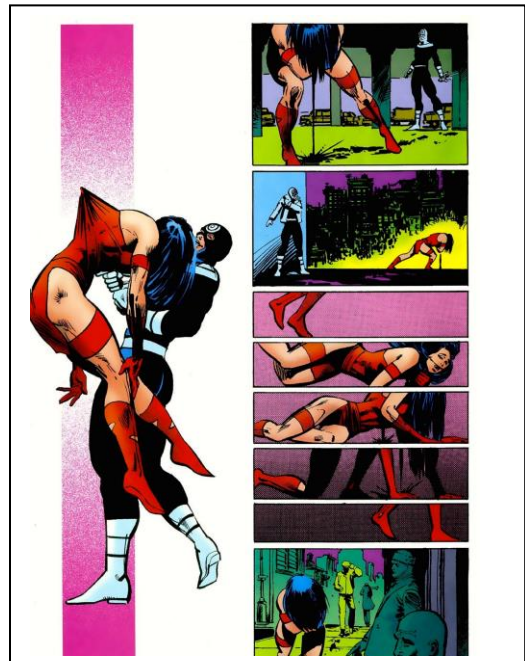


Figure 2: Frank Miller and Klaus Janson *Daredevil*

was hooked. Long vertical panels stretched the full length of the page. Longer panels afforded the artist an opportunity to mimic film but the flexibility to change dimensions of the “screen” on whim. The elongated panels again changed my approach to art. I was not drawn to the 18x24 inch format of common, easily available pre-stretched canvases but was excited by a drawing 2x18 inches on a 12x18 inch piece of Bristol board.

To understand composition more completely, I studied graphic novels the way others might study a violin composition, even to the extent of counting the number of panels per page in *Predator vs. Batman* to better comprehend narrative pacing. When I tried my hand at comics, I unconsciously focused on one panel I was trying to polish to perfection more than others. I fixated on one image at the expense of the overall story.

Individual panels became more or less important to me, rather than all being equally necessary for the story to come together.

I continued my studies and found my way to the Fine Art section of the public library and began supplementing the library’s books with my own growing art library. Initially, I was fascinated by Michelangelo, as his drawings and studies for the Sistine Chapel read more like superhero stories than Old Testament prophets (who knew those guys like Ezekiel were



Figure 3: Adam and Andy Kubert *Batman Vs Predator Interior Art*

so buff?). The crosshatching was evident accompanied by a richly layered story presented as in a movie or graphic novel. The idealism conveyed in Italian art also seemed less inspiring—what did those perfect, unrealistic bodies painted in Rome using such bright colors have to do with a nerdy, socially awkward homeschooler? What did they have in common with anyone else in the world today? To say “not much” would reveal exactly how young, callow, stupid, and naïve I was at the time.

The etchings and drypoints of Rembrandt were, to me, a textbook of how to create depth using only line on paper. I tried to draw objects around me as Rembrandt did but quickly comprehended that I needed greater technical skill to create the same depth and detail of art and character. I have a natural affinity for artists of the Northern European tradition dating from the 15th century whose work, in terms of subject matter, resembled Rembrandt’s. This group



Figure 4: Rembrandt *Self Portrait*, etching, 1630

of painters, whether in secular or religious works, relied on direct observation of people and places in their intricate complexity. Even in religious works, the figures seemed to be actual people doing actual things in an actual world. The German, Dutch, French, and, later, British painters were not, like the Italians, hindered by direct influence and reverence of ancient

Greek and Roman art or by any perceived need to recreate Rome's domination of the art world. Artists of the northern renaissance would also make art pieces celebrating Christianity and religion but included a distrust of religious imagery. This distrust would spill over into the iconoclasm of the Protestant Reformation. Northern European artists could focus increasingly on the world as it existed, and the resulting evident connection to the physical world and reality was exhilarating. Remember, I am from the Midwest: I have some imagination, but if I can't touch it, I can't paint it.

German and Dutch work also evidenced a kind of stoicism, a rejection of Baroque emotionalism and an emphasis on the moment as opposed to the action. Fastidiously observed naturalistic detail became a hallmark of the painters of this new era. The representation of space and textures was strongly enhanced with the development of oil paint. Jan van Eyck's fabulous *Arnolfini Portrait* shows the couple standing holding hands, a window depicted on the left of the panel and a bed on the right. Details such as the dog and the wooden shoes at the couple's



Figure 5: Jan van Eyck, *Arnolfini Portrait*, Oil on panel, 1434

feet are precisely portrayed. Other minute detail includes the tiny addition in the background of a convex mirror with the Stations of the Cross and the reflected image of the wedded couple in addition to van Eyck accompanied by an unidentified other as they stood for that



Figure 6: Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of a Young Venetian Woman* Oil on panel, 1505



Figure 7: Albrecht Dürer, *Young Hare*, Watercolor on paper, 1502

portrait. Although there are some stylizations to the piece this is a portrait of two people standing in the real world with all its individualist glory.

Later, Albrecht Dürer, perhaps the first international artist because of his trip to Venice (Sullivan, 2008), developed watercolors of nature that illustrate his direct observations of plants and animals (MILLS, 1991). Dürer's *Portrait of a Young Venetian Woman* of 1505 features an unfinished portrait of a young woman he painted on his trip to Italy. Remnants of the underdrawings peek out in areas such as the right shoulder, where the artist moved the neckline. The underdrawing is evident subtly in the chin, which is defined by a single light line; and the face, where light hatching starts to gently define the features. In its state, the portrait demonstrates the artist's process; we can see the painting's construction by observing

the unfinished or unresolved areas. Dürer's famous watercolors *A Great Piece of Turf* and *A Young Hare* reflect a precise recording of nature. Although Dürer did artistically treat numerous religious subjects throughout his life, many consider his portraits and botanical or zoological studies to be his best work. Slightly later, Hans Holbein, a German immigrant to the court of Henry VII, in England, painted the portrait of Sir Thomas More, with his soft gray stubble of a beard and carefully observed eyelashes. These painters and, to a lesser extent, Hugo van der Goes, Hans Memling, and Roger van der Weyden would provide the aesthetic models for my work.

Nonetheless, there remained one aspect of these works that I found disquieting. The stiff centralized compositions of Dürer or Memling or virtually any of the Flemish or Dutch painters, while classically beautiful, based as they were on geometric divisions of the picture plane, were not as exciting or accessible as I'd hoped. The inked panels of Frank Miller's *Daredevil* with



Figure 8: Albrecht Dürer, *A Great Piece of Turf Watercolor on paper, 1503*



Figure 9: Hans Holbein the Younger, *Portrait of Sir Thomas Moore, Oil on Oak, 1527*



Figure 10: Gustav Klimt, *Salome*, Oil on Canvas, 1909

dynamically long, thin panels induced a sense of movement and excitement. It was a potential energy that I could identify in the blue-bound collections of Japanese and Chinese paintings, but the looser style of these paintings fought with my inclination for tight hatching and control. At last, I found that kind of representation coexisting or cohabiting with abstract understructure or composition within the work of Gustav Klimt. Gustav Klimt's such as *Salome* took the minute, direct observation of the Northern Renaissance, combined it with a linear graphic quality, and then infused it with abstraction inspired by different world cultures. Klimt's asymmetrical compositions did away with the strictures of a Western compositional paradigm of ratios and geometric constructions to simply move the focal

point to a third of the composition. Short squat paintings with ratios like 2:3 or 3:4 were replaced by long, thin paintings that stretched along a horizon or dripped with a human figure. Like my discovering the etchings of Rembrandt, this was not so much a departure as a spiral-like "return" to ideas and concepts rooted in my own developing personal aesthetic.

By now, I wanted to identify an artist who was closer to home and more contemporary. There is something refined and decorative about Klimt that I admired but

knew was not constitutionally compatible with my life. I longed for subject matter that I could understand and find palpable. It seemed an elusive, primitive, utilitarian, and almost Puritan-like quality that was lacking—a wildness or strength inherent in tales of frontier survival. The watercolors of

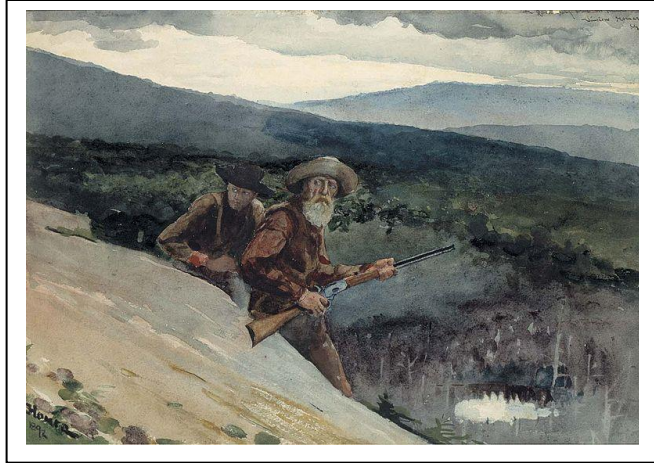


Figure 11: Winslow Homer, Bear Hunting Prospect Rock, Watercolor and graphite on paper, 1892

Winslow Homer came close, with images of men taking game in the Adirondacks. Thomas Eakins creates strikingly frank representations of people, but the layout just didn't fit my style. I like to joke that Grant Wood was born on a farm and moved to Cedar Rapids as a boy, whereas I was born in Cedar Rapids and moved to a farm as a boy. The rebirth of the Northern Renaissance in the guise of an overalls-wearing Iowa farm boy named Grant Wood finally showed me that it was okay to be both rural and an artist.

Grant Wood took the Iowa landscape and its stoic people and filtered them through the lenses of artists like Memling and Dürer to celebrate the Midwest. In fact, during the 1930's while working in Munich with German artisans on a stained-glass commission, Grant Wood had the opportunity to study these Flemish and German painters work firsthand and the work had a lasting effect on the artist. In many ways, Grant Wood's portraits are reinterpretations of preexisting models or conventions of portraiture established during the Renaissance. Wood's work is contemporary in one sense but, simultaneously, seems nostalgic in its searching for an America that no longer existed and, quite possibly, never did.

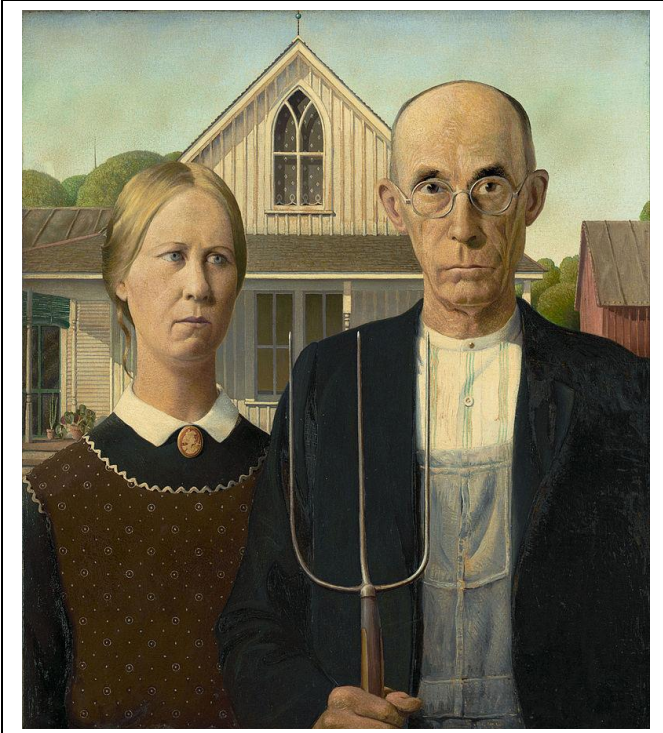


Figure 12: Grant Wood's, *American Gothic*, Oil on Panel, 1930

In most of his works, Wood dresses his models in clothes that had been almost forty years out of style when Wood used them in his paintings in the 1930s and very early 1940s (Taylor, 2005). If we look at his masterpiece, or at least best-known work, *American Gothic*, we see the artist's sister and dentist dressed up like a small-town father and his daughter (Corn, 1983). It was not a great conceptual leap from these more contemporary "portraits" as a

kind of a historical fiction often bordering on satire epitomized by *Woman with Plants*, *American Gothic*, or *Victorian Survival* to his allegorical or historical paintings of his later years. Wood's death in 1942 robbed us of a "late period". Perhaps he would have returned to his oil paintings of specific people. The devotion to the Midwest and the trumpeting of American virtues through the American scene were perhaps naïve and quaint as World War II ground to a halt in 1945. The global nature of the confrontation made regional concerns seem less significant to an America that was no longer a backwater of the world but a superpower soon to be embroiled in a nearly a half-century-long Cold War. It is not insignificant that the most famous student of a regionalist teacher was Thomas Hart Benton's student, Jackson Pollack, who worked as a studio assistant for Benton in the 1930's (Hodermarsky, 2014). Grant Wood provided, through his portraits, work worthy of admiration

that focused on rural America. Rural America is real and familiar to me. It provides an almost limitless wealth of inspiration.

The generation of representational artists that came to maturity directly following the Regionalists were inspired by Regionalism in form but rejecting the more bucolic excesses of the movement created a balanced yet dissonant worldview. No good label, no easy category, no particular school can sum up these artists. Most of these American artists are representational artists; all were influenced at some level by Surrealism, and all dealt with trauma as a theme. The term “Magical Realist artists” is bandied about as a descriptor, though this label is problematic in connotation. The term started life, as a phrase used to describe the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the “new objectivity” art of Germany in the 1920s. (Schmalenbach, 1961) Defined simply, Magical Realism in a broad sense applies to literature as well as art and describes any work that is essentially realistic in representation but uses “magical” elements that are undergirded by an inherent realism otherwise within the piece.

I posit an overly simplistic definition for American Magical Realism as:

American Magical Realism in art = Regionalism + Surrealism.

Although that definition is simplistic, it functions as a starting point for discussion. In American art, Magical Realism combines accurate representation plus the strange or odd, ineffable component that is so common in life. Something unexplained or unexplainable or, possibly, eerie in the work adds that magical touch. This definition is broad enough that a magical element can be something as simple as Andrew Wyeth’s inclusion of something ominous or strange. The magic could also lie in Jules Kirschenbaum’s representational rendering of a skull among simplified or distorted things. Sometimes it isn’t the subject of the

piece that makes an individual work strange or surreal but the method or media in which the work is created.

Future historians may, ultimately, clarify the definition of Magical Realism if the pendulum ever swings back toward representational work. However, the very breadth of artists traditionally included in the category Magical Realism reduces the term to a generic descriptor for all representational artists with any symbolist impulse who worked during the twentieth century. Even the American painter, Edward Hopper of *Nighthawk* fame and Gustav Klimt the symbolist painter of Vienna have been lumped in with these painters labeled as magical realists.

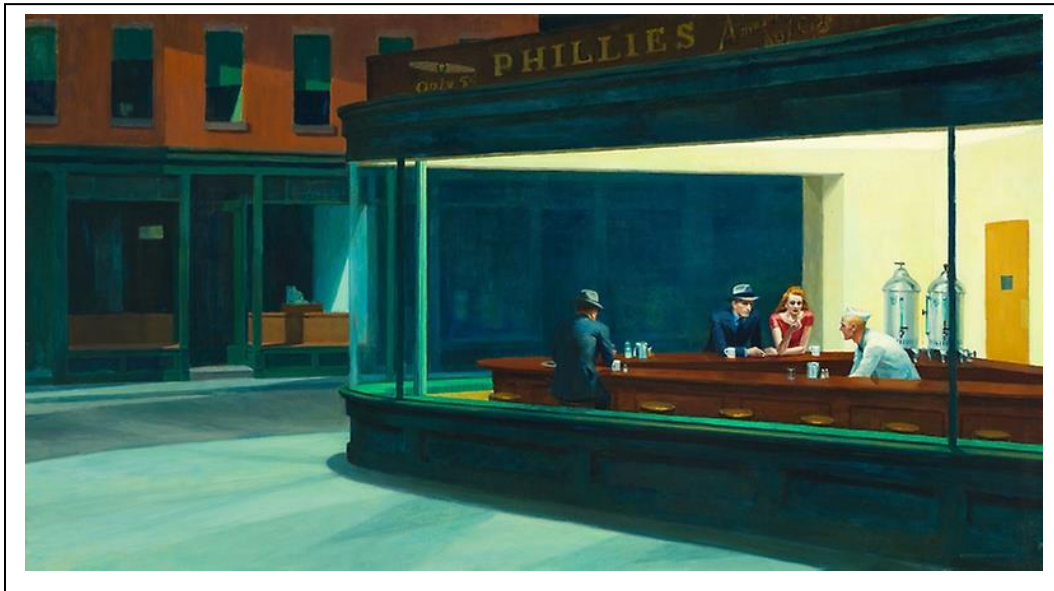


Figure 13: Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, Oil on canvas, 1943

Further, refinement of the concept of Magical Realism have championed alternative interpretations. Some see Magical Realism with its reliance upon subjective perspective,

As a member of the Wisconsin Surrealists, the Wisconsin artist John Wilde (1919 to 2006) rejected Regionalism for a more regional form of Surrealism. His work probably first touched me when I experienced it in the collections of the Chazen Museum (formerly the

Elvehjem Museum of Art). Wilde's delicate silverpoint drawings and finely detailed oil paintings reveal obvious influences of the Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, his onetime disciple Carl Jung, and the famous Spanish painter Salvador Dali in their near-obsession with sex and death (Seymour, 1990). Of all Wilde's works, perhaps the greatest is *Muss es sein? Es muss sein!* the title of which even as a lad I knew to refer to Beethoven and his powerful String Quartet No. 16, his last major work and the epitome of the rhythmic pounding now so identified with Beethoven's music. Wilde's work features a portrait of a nude man and woman sitting upon oversized skulls in a bleak environment filled



Figure 14: John Wilde, *Muss es sein? Es muss sein!*, Oil on panel, 1979-1981

with skulls. On the horizon are two orbs or planetary objects rising in the sky. Though dissimilar to my own style, the work struck me as inspiring. There is a perceptible physicality to the work as the patient application of egg tempera builds up forms.

Andrew Wyeth's work also falls under the broad umbrella of Magical Realism and is the painter who has had the single biggest impact on my work. Andrew Wyeth was based in Pennsylvania and Maine and, throughout his career, painted the remote, rural areas in dull, muted colors. The son of the famous illustrator N. C. Wyeth, Andrew Wyeth worked in watercolor, drybrush (a variant of watercolor), or the quick-to-dry, painstaking medium of egg tempera. Wyeth's best-known work, *Christina's World*, 1948 tempera on panel is a

masterwork of the twentieth century. In *Christina's World*, a young woman is depicted crawling across an open grassy field toward buildings in the upper right-hand corner (Griffin, 2010).



Figure 15: Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's world*, Tempera on Panel, 1948

My discovery of Wyeth's work liberated my work in unexpected ways. First, Wyeth's palette of grays, browns, ochres, and sienna earth tones matched my own formal impulses. Wyeth came of age during WWII but was exempt from the draft because of medical conditions. The brutality of the prolonged conflict, in which the civilized nations of Europe perpetrated some of the most inhumane atrocities imaginable, left many questioning their own beliefs, and no doubt contributed to a generally bleak worldview among the generation of artists who experienced the First World War

For me, discovering Wyeth at age sixteen recalibrated my perspective on fine art. To my eye, Wyeth's paintings began abstractly yet revealed a keen awareness of compositional underpinnings. Wyeth found the inherent abstractions of nature and included them within his

work. Wyeth was very much aware of Abstract Expressionism and action painters such as Jackson Pollack. Wyeth's masterpiece *Christina's World* is Sahara dry: pure egg tempera with no splatter. Works such as his *Weatherside* feature splatter and dripping paint. In *Weatherside*, Wyeth portrays the rear of the Olson house made famous earlier in *Christina's World*. The grass in *Weatherside* is shocking in its loose and abstract technique. Wyeth was incredibly aware of the art world around him and consciously reacted to it. Some have called Wyeth's work "illustrative" to focus on the superficial aspects of the portrayals, but that misses the point. Merely knowing the story "illustrated" is one thing, while knowing what the

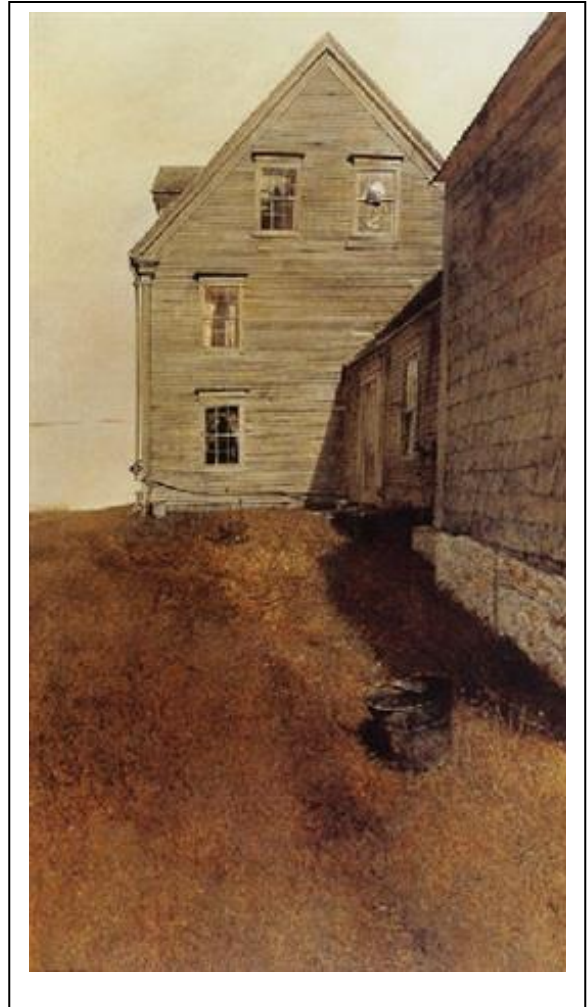


Figure 16: Andrew Wyeth, Waterside, Tempera on Panel, 1965

story means is another, and that difference is at the heart of my efforts. In reading Wyeth's own writings, I found myself inspired by the fact that Wyeth himself often seemed unable to fathom the depth and significance of his own work

Jules Kirschenbaum is also included under the Magical Realism umbrella. Jules Kirschenbaum (1930 to 2000) was a painter, draftsman, and printmaker whose work became very influential to me during graduate work at Iowa State University. Originally born in New York, Kirschenbaum was a prolific artist whose work earned him a Fulbright scholarship.

Study of Kirschenbaum's work encouraged me to reconsider the intricate patterns of the contours and reintroduced to negative space as a compositional element. His inclusion of bones of all species in drawings reinvigorated and strengthened my interest in drawing the



Figure 17: Jules Kirschenbaum, *Skulls II*, Acrylic on Canvas, 1999

roadkill and the dead animals I found around the farm. Kirschenbaum's own work is far more studio-based than my own. He created his work predominantly indoors at his studio in Des Moines, Iowa, and his work is richly dense with literary and philosophical themes. His later paintings, *Earthbound Scholar* and *Skulls II* are, for me, some of the more underappreciated gems of twentieth-century art. I feel that his last painting, *Skulls II*, is among the most emotionally laden I have seen. Kirschenbaum died slowly of cancer and was aware that he would not live to finish that painting. To choose a table of skulls as the last thing to paint before facing the great unknown is to make a bold statement. Within the piece, skull upon skull is stacked on a broad table. Left unfinished at the artist's death, there are spatial ambiguities and distortions in the setup, objects seem to float, the table disappears at points, and space layers oddly.

One final painter—and the only living one—to be discussed in this thesis is Odd Nerdrum. I admire Norway’s greatest painter and self-appointed “King of Kitsch” as an artist not only because of his paintings, which harken formally to the Old Masters, but also because of his rebellious aesthetic position. Calling out the institutional biases against representational artwork within the art world at large and specifically in Oslo, Nerdrum famously declared himself a painter of Kitsch and demanded that the art world judge his work by those standards. Those standards are

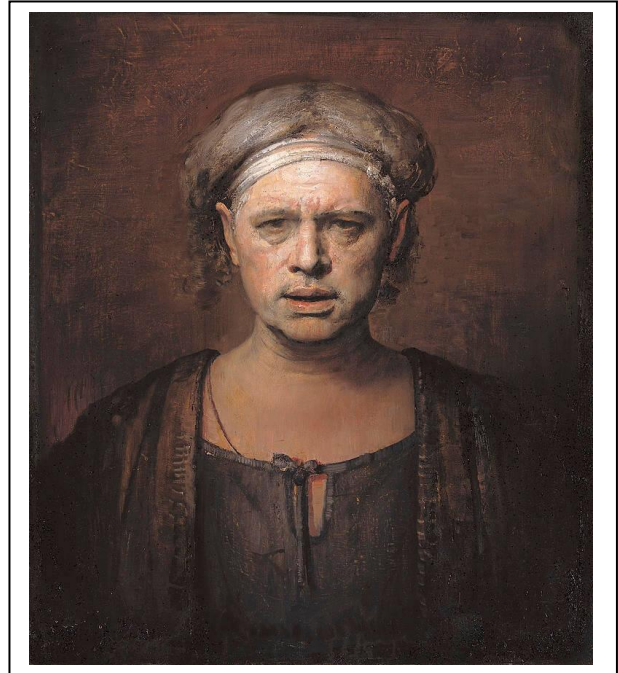


Figure 18: Odd Nerdrum, Self Portrait, Oil on Canvas, 1983

premodern and include sentimentality, pathos, emotion, traditional craft in painting, and technical skill. Nerdrum reactively reclaimed a pejorative idiom and embraced Kitsch as his own. Nerdrum’s work focuses on emotional and universal subject matter in contemplating eternal themes such as death, mankind’s return to nature, a relationship between a mother and her child, or between a father and his son. Nerdrum’s work is strongest in his isolated Rembrandt-esque figures standing against desolate landscapes. These works are powerful in their physicality and apocalyptic nature and metaphoric significance. Nerdrum is quite different from Rembrandt spiritually even if their work bears a more than passing formal resemblance. Rembrandt’s pictures portray a fallen man firmly rooted within a Christian concept of man as both flawed yet created in the image of God. Nerdrum’s concept of

humanity is very different, placing more emphasis on huddled masses feebly challenging forces beyond their ability to control.

Common threads link these three artists: Nerdrum, Wyeth, Kirschbaum and Wilde. Themes of isolation and abandonment recur through the works of all four. Eugene L. Arva argues that magical realism is an attempt to reconstruct traumatic events through oblique kinds of representation, depictions of experience are privileged over knowledge, and a kind of response to the dissolution of signs and signifiers in postmodernity as reality becomes more subjectively defined. As Arva argues, Magical Realism is “the only reality one can remember in order to forget trauma.” (Arva, 2008)

Every artist of this final quartet created a world composed largely of self-imposed



Figure 19: Jules Kirschbaum, Là-Bas, Mixed Media, 1981

isolation from the art world. Even Jules Kirschbaum, perhaps the least isolated at Drake

University, in Des Moines, Iowa wished he could have returned to New York to paint. All these artists except Odd Nerdrum used deliberate cross-hatching and hatching in both their drawings and their paintings. The mark-making is minute but physical, and it builds or weaves the paintings into final shape. Even Nerdrum, the loosest of the four who primarily used oil paint, was very sensitive in his mark making and would rework with nontraditional methods like box cutters. This detail orientation was almost innate to the primary media these artists chose. Egg tempera or acrylic for Kirschenbaum. Silverpoint or oil for John Wilde. Egg tempera and drybrush watercolor for Wyeth—two mediums which are very drawing based. Each artist examined death in his individual isolation. A slight skepticism about society might be manifest in each artist's work. For John Wilde, inspired as he was by the study of psychology and Surrealism, the unease related to the dark irrational forces and impulses that lurk the conscious. For Andrew Wyeth, it was a skepticism about the belief that the world and people were different from those of the Middle Ages. His work looks medieval in that technology rarely invades. Wyeth's work seems haunted by the untimely death of his own father in an automobile collision with a train. His decades long fascination with the Kuerner farm, the very farm where his father died attests to this (Geselbracht, 1974). Kirshenbaum, perhaps the most philosophical of the four, found the innate human need to dream to hold transcendent meaning in a life to make our reality significant and understandable. Finally, Nerdrum sensed man returning to a place away from the lies and superficialities of modern life and art. Famously, while visiting a museum, Nerdrum became disillusioned at the sight of Robert Rauschenberg's famous sculpture, *Monograph*, featuring a taxidermy goat with a tire around its midsection standing on a littered surface.

CHAPTER 2. PROCESS

As arguably lowbrow, Kitsch, or plebian as it might sound, the artist to whom I owe the most in terms of procedure is Norman Rockwell.

Rockwell's method as published in Rockwell's book *My Adventures as an Illustrator* is central to my understanding of how to successfully and consistently take a painting from idea to canvas. Rockwell's method was rooted within the classical atelier approach and designed to ensure that an artist devote sufficient forethought and premeditation to successfully finish paintings in

a mostly drama-free manner. He defined a process that worked, was repeatable, and produced results of high quality.

My process of creating a picture moves through stages of ideation, thumbnails, photography, more thumbnails, preliminary drawings, line drawings on panel, shading underdrawings on panel, and finally to painting. I generally start any painting or drawing by sketching thumbnails of what I think the piece will feature. I identify the subject matter, and journal to begin identifying what the piece means to me. After getting a broad idea of both the subject and the significance of the piece, I collect reference. Quite often, I photograph the subject and shoot reference of not only the subject but also background and detail photos so that I have enough material to piece together any composition I need. Then I correct and crop photos on the computer and then do more thumbnail sketching. The process also involves



Figure 20: Norman Rockwell, Freedom of Speech, Oil on canvas, 1943

more iterative journaling—writing and thinking to make sure the composition I have chosen best suits the message of the work. After ensuring that the composition meets my specifications, I transfer the composition to panel, deleting distracting elements or moving things as necessary to achieve my aims for the composition.

As I start on actual panel, and after getting the line drawing correct, I begin adding value. I start with hatching and then blending or working over the composition. After getting the under-drawing correct, I either glaze color in, using various acrylic media, or finish refining the values so that I complete the work as a drawing with a full range of values.

I describe this method as “directly indirect.” In indirect painting, an artist uses an underdrawing to work out issues of proportion, composition and value in the drawing stage, when corrections are often easiest, and then paints on top of that. When I refer to my process as “directly indirect,” it is because I consider my way the most streamlined direct form of indirect painting as it relies heavily on the drawing. The indirect aspect of the painting process emerges as I purposely allow the form of the graphite to show through and give form to the color that I am applying on top. This method has parallels in the contemporary practice of some watercolorists, many Renaissance artists, and in various forms of illustration. This includes graphic novels in which enhanced penciling is increasingly mainstream.

Death is something universal and defining. Painting is a personal attempt to order a world of unlimited possibilities of interpretation. Drawing death is one way to try to impose order upon the greatest unknown. For me, looking into the soulless sockets of the dead creatures is an attempt to look past the curve of the earth toward a mystery I will someday know and can only face alone.

In every portrait or landscape, I force the viewer to interact with only one subject in one environment. It is almost as if looking at an anhydrous ammonia tank could be analogous to looking at the etched face, weathered by time and responsibilities, of an older person.

The author of Genesis writes that Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Whether you believe in the God of the Old or New Testament or any testament is irrelevant. Buddhism has a similar message—the first of the four noble truths is that life is suffering. Although the four truths are perhaps overplayed by western scholars (Clough, 2003) the remaining three noble truths refer to the ways to transcend suffering by various means. In Christianity, the immediate effect of the first transgression is that the pre-mortal couple know they are naked and sew themselves clothing made of fig leaves. Pain enters the world, together with self-consciousness and the understanding that they stand naked and vulnerable in the world. Much that is evil starts, ironically, from empathy and the ability to understand the experiences of others. The evil arises with the logical extension of the knowledge of our own fragility to the knowledge that we know exactly how to hurt others. An animal might want to eat you, but most will not torture you to death slowly for entertainment. Even a cat will kill the mouse after a short time.

My portraits primarily involve two subjects—brunettes with long hair, and people with guns. I think I started with brunettes because of a familiarity bias (most of my family have dark hair), and, with that said, nothing is more fun than drawing dark hair in graphite, with each move of the pencil defining a hair. I wanted to create paintings of people I knew in a way that no one had before. While the women subjects of my work are strong and capable, always looking ahead, they still convey a sensitivity or vulnerability that combines with their pose and strength to convey unease and wariness. It is true that guns are a part of history and

contribute to the personality of some of the subjects, the guns themselves are not the point. The feeling of subtle uncertainty combined with the desire for protection from whatever lies ahead is the mood conveyed by these works. Some subjects look ahead armed only by their brains and physical strength; others have tools.

They consumed a lot of energy, and my landscapes may well be superior to them in a number of ways. In the end, I did the portraits as a kind of visual journal, collecting interesting people along the way.

CHAPTER 3. THE SHOW

This show is primarily a traditional gallery-style exhibit of paintings and drawings created during my graduate career. My art is about honest emotion, careful observations, interpretations, and life. The portraits are of people I know, but they represent people across the Midwest and beyond, by revealing the universal threads and the common mortal experience that are part of human life. The landscapes are of places I have walked, but they are symbolic of the landscapes of many lives. The dead animals are all animals I have found on walks or alongside the road just like those that can be found everywhere.

I conceive of this show as a family reunion. It showcases a collection of related individual works, each telling its individual story while having a dialogue with each other and with each viewer. Each piece thus speaks in a separate voice but also in dialogue with the pieces around it. The collective connotes something about the land, the community, the family, and the artist. What follows is a brief description of each work within the show and a description of what the work embodies and attempts to convey.

The show was at Design on Main between March 20 and April 2, 2018. Images and descriptions of all artwork are included in Appendix 1. The show's title, "Resurrection", conveys the belief in the resurrection of all things.

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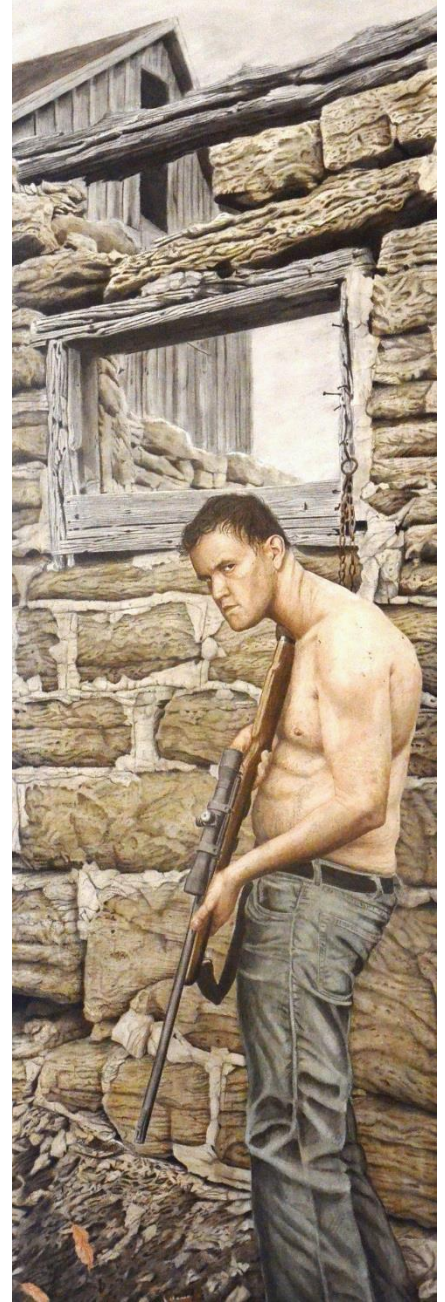
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APPENDIX. IMAGES FROM THE SHOW

1. "Self-Portrait"

Mixed Acrylic Media and Graphite on Panel, 72"x24"

In this self-portrait, I am holding a .22 caliber bolt-action rifle and standing in front of the remaining foundation of an 1840s barn built by my ancestor and namesake Robert David Jinkins. I return to this place and create a self-portrait in front of this barn every two years; this is my third piece. In many ways, this is a portrait about generations. When this barn was still standing, back when my dad was a kid in the 1960s, he used to shoot doves and pigeons in the rafters with a pellet rifle. My grandfather, my father's dad, used to milk cows in that barn, and I am sure he chased more than one opossum out the door with a gun. I try to think of the space as if everything that has ever transpired in it is happening at the same instant. The roof is no longer evident, but traces of it remain. The great oak beam, now worn down by the elements like a piece of driftwood, was once a freshly milled beam or, far earlier, a tree swaying on the oak savanna that was to become Wisconsin. Soft, yellow limestone still sits covered by the earth in the quarry a mere two hundred yards away from where it was quarried by my ancestors for the foundation stones. Ages before that, the rock, consisting of living prehistoric coral reefs, lay under a great body of water. In the relative blink of an eye, the mortar is fresh and new. I am standing in the same space as my father and his father before him. While this piece is a self-portrait, it could just as easily be a portrait of my father, or his father, or his grandfather. There is also an intentionally ominous quality to the work, an ambiguity about the action occurring. This work, which is rooted in the past, might equally speak to the future and the myriad possibilities of what may come yet to pass. I wonder what the next generation might experience at that stone door.



2. "Sparrow"

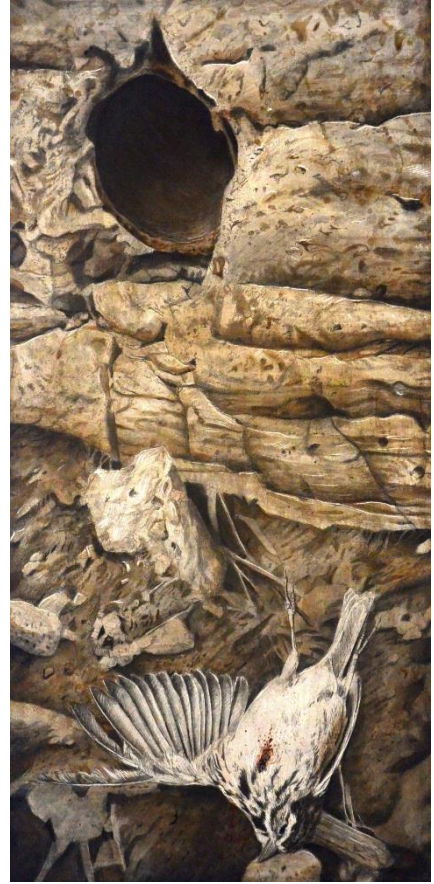
Mixed Acrylic Media and Graphite, 24"x12"

This work describes a drainage gutter from the same fallen milking barn that served as a backdrop for my self-portrait. This time the sparrow was temporarily rescued—to use the word loosely—from a family cat and was posed for this work. The painting is a response to my self-portrait in that it compositionally mirrors my own image. It is as if I am the sparrow lying dead in the barn.

I accidentally killed a black-capped chickadee with a lucky—or unlucky—snowball when I was about ten years old. I was racked with guilt as a consequence. It didn't help that two weeks after killing the chickadee, I started reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Guilt. Death. Life.

Hesitation. Regret. These are all part of this work.

As I worked, a kind of morbid spirituality kept returning to my mind, a line of that old hymn "His Eye Is on the Sparrow": "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me."



3. “Jars of Clay IV”

Graphite on Panel, 24”x72”

I return periodically to the imagery of the lone anhydrous ammonia tank. These tanks were mysterious enigmatic monuments in my youth. My sister and I played upon and climbed on them. Later on, these tanks were cleaned, their tires inflated, the tubes replaced, and everything about them made functional again.

Though rusty, these tanks have used to side-dress ammonia in cornfields as recently as spring 2017. Although the tanks don’t look like much, they still have their integrity, and they safely contain the liquid fertilizer so can continue to perform their important task. Anhydrous ammonia is extremely hazardous to handle; indeed, some younger farmers don’t use it because of the dangerous characteristics of the colorless gas. Anhydrous means “without water.” When anhydrous ammonia meets water, it sucks out the water. On skin or membranes, this causes burns. If mishandled, the gas can react with moisture-rich organs and scald a person’s lungs or blind him or her. The gas is stored under pressure and requires well-maintained equipment for safe handling. As one looks at the cracked and rusted surface of this anhydrous ammonia tank, one should—if one is aware of the purpose of the tank—doubt the safety of vessel to contain the dangerous but useful gas.

I find we do a similar thing when we look at people. We judge them by their outward appearances without first knowing their true inner nature. An instantaneous judgment might be correct, but it could just as easily be wrong.

The building in the background on the horizon is the old Bolt house. Back in the 1950s, Old Man Bolt died there and sat in his rocking chair in front of the television for three days before anyone found him. The telephone and electric power lines are now cut between the house and the power grid. The house itself has been abandoned for years. I think of the contrast between these two inanimate objects. The fact there is now no live power or electricity going to the house contrasts with the clear but active and dangerous gas running through the spidery tube veins of the tank.

Connected versus unconnected. Empty versus full. Jars of Clay.



4. "Apotheosis of Death"

Graphite on Panel, 72"x24"

The windmill turns in an empty field, its steel fins spinning but making no progress across a gray sky. Night falls, and still the windmill traces circles, ever moving but ever stationary. Rain beats against it. The sun warms and bakes it. Once a house sat with the windmill, and maybe a barn. Now there is only the windmill, a lone survivor keeping a perpetual vigil.

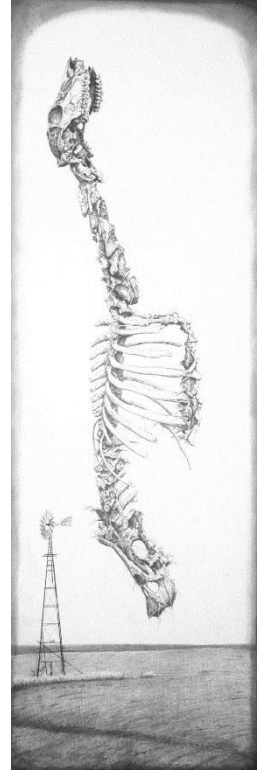
Rust dots the galvanized metal blades, which have witnessed the elements for over a hundred years. The blades groan on ineffectually; the pump is disengaged from the stand pipe and now leans uselessly against the tower. Creak. Screech.

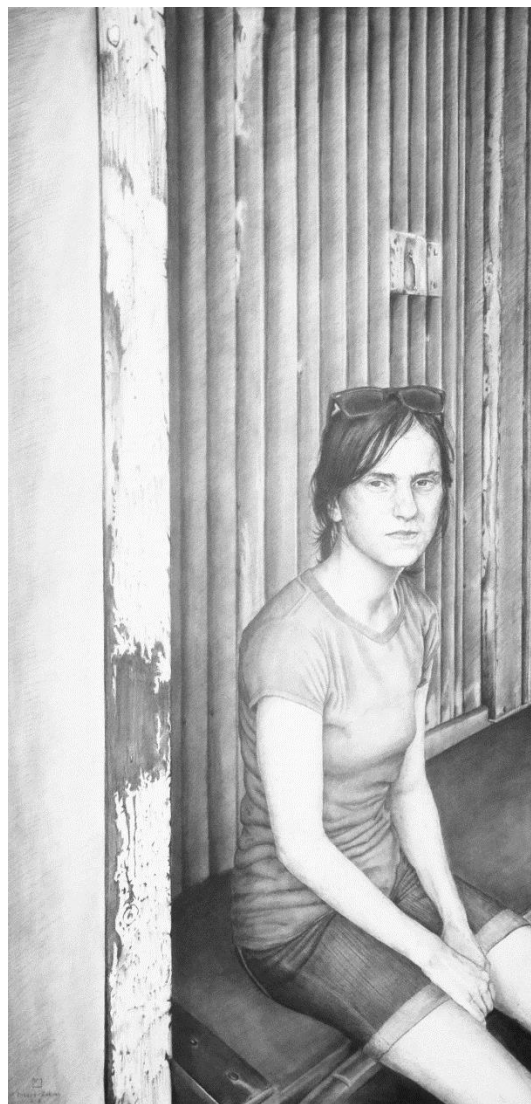
The day could have been lush summer—the fields baled and the blank horizon behind the windmill stretching in an eternal line. The time could be dawn, with the ginger light just interrupting and then chasing the darkness from the east. It could be a clear spring sky, white at the horizon where the atmosphere seems thicker, blending into the light blue above that, into a deep fathomless indigo stretching away above that. But it is not. It is a dull, gray, lusterless day in late February. The winter wheat lies matted in the fields, with green buds deep underground waiting for spring to call them upward. Tall, dried grass arcs and bends like a Gothic cathedral with pointed arches. Let's pray the winterkill isn't too bad this year.

They say that none but God knows the hour and the place of the Resurrection, that moment which both the living and those under the earth will be called before Him. They say that time comes like a thief in a night, with no noise or warning. They say a lot of things.

On this uneventful ordinary day—much like many others that the battered old windmill has witnessed—from the earth, bone and marrow are raised. The windmill's form is like that of a deer carcass—say, a large doe with a long skull stretched by age. The bones separate from the disturbed fur and rotted hide and moldy flesh. Vertebrae, ribs, and skull strain heavenward; it is only temporal gravity that keeps the whole suspended. The cartilage strains backward against the snow white of the bug-cleaned bones. The bones tug upward while the more indefinable but temporary mettle keeps the body from being levitated away. Suspended, the carcass floats merely a foot above the earth, but halfway between heaven and hell.

Can those empty sockets see? Could, if given a new spark of life, those teeth eat at the dull ochre blades of grass that both nourished and irritated its fleshly form? The battle lasted for only an instant—a moment that cannot be measured except perhaps by any other of the regular but unsyncopated creakings of the windmill. Skreetch.





5. “Corner of 11th”

Graphite on Panel, 48”x24”

I began this portrait during my first semester of graduate school in 2015--, in a frantic attempt to “collect” friends and acquaintances from high school before they changed too much—and before I changed too much.

This is one of the first portraits I did featuring an urban setting. It is the loading dock of a building in the warehouse district in Dubuque. That city is undergoing a transformation—the old abandoned warehouses are becoming gentrified and transformed into apartments, coffeehouses, and hippie art studios. There is a magical authentic about abandoned spaces—but this was not one of those spaces. Not anymore.

There is something about a car left in a field to rust away for half a century. There is something about the tin of an old roof pulled up by the wind. It is something about death—that feeling in late summer as the afternoon sun makes you squint into the inevitability of winter.

I shot the photographic reference on my way to Iowa State University for the first time as a graduate student—my car loaded with art books, clothes, and blank panels to be filled.

6. "Memento"

Graphite on Panel, 24"x36"

This is a portrait of a high school friend, Chris, who joined the Marines right after graduating from high school. I started this work when he returned one summer on leave. Both homeschooled students, Chris and I were involved in our group's production of the play *Cyrano*. In the play, in Act IV, Chris played a soldier who dies on the battlefield. I painted the sets for the play, which included ominous, cracked rampart. The cracked background of the portrait refers to the slightly awkward ramparts I painted in service of that production. In the derelict cinderblock background of the portrait, I included but obscured both an M4 rifle and a skull. This work features what I consider to be one of the finest passages in any drawing I have ever done, as the sunglasses reflect my undergraduate art building's air system.

The title *Memento* comes from an offhand remark in which the sitter described the smell of cigarette smoke as being a memento of his father, who also smoked. The photographer Yousuf Karsh would have engaged conversation with the sitter and would have set up a camera and used a trigger to take the picture of the sitter at rest or at an important moment within the conversation. To really portray someone, I need to think about their mannerisms, and there was a telling, dismissive, fluid gesture that Chris performed with his fingers, like holding and smoking a cigarette.





7. "Totem"

Graphite on Panel, 48"x18"

I created this piece for the Ledges Project (a project in which various Iowa State University art faculty and graduate students created works of art in response to Ledges State Park). I found this deer carcass after getting lost on my first visit, when I accidentally walked around the entire south side of the park. It was a busy day—Memorial Day or something—and everyone was out cooking burgers, throwing the old pigskin, and listening to country music. I stumbled into a remote part of the park, past the roses marking the foundations of an old homestead long gone, down a serpentine deer trail, beside an ivory mausoleum of a refrigerator, and down into the bowels of the forest. Despite its being a busy day, there wasn't a single human footprint in that gulley.

First, I found a leg; then upstream I found the carcass. This deer with the detritus brought by the spring flood reminded me of Robert Rauschenberg's sculpture *Monogram*, which includes a goat with a tire around its midsection. Observe how the deer looks upward, yearning to touch the blue sky above. Did it touch it? I wonder.

The title *Totem* refers both to the spirit of the deer and to the drawing as an art object. I like to think about Rauschenberg's tire as being a kind of eye to the earth, like the empty eye socket of a deer.

8. “The Postmodernist’s Possum”

Graphite on Panel, 36”x24”

When I lived on the south side of Ames, I was once driving by the stadium and the parking area, and happened upon a dead beaver that had been hit by a vehicle at a stoplight just off Mortenson Parkway. I pulled off into the grassy stadium parking lot, and after retrieving a pair of gloves, moved the poor little animal from the pavement and into the ditch. I returned about three weeks later to find most of its flesh consumed by maggots, its bones picked clean, and its fur matted by the rain. The reptilian tail had become like leather, and everything was untouched except for the damage to the beaver’s skull, crushed at the time of death by the car’s brutal tire. The beaver is like the frog—a shapeshifter that, although mammal, makes its home in the water. It is an animal of fluidity and space between designators. This painting is both representational and abstract, in the way of suggesting what is not shown.

I called the work *The Postmodernist’s Possum* because of the Postmodern rejection of truth, realism, and labels as being culturally relative—teleological and dangerous. Perhaps they are. But to such thinkers, a beaver might as well be a possum.



9. "Door"

Graphite on Panel, 36"x48"

This is the old front door of the farmhouse I grew up in in Wisconsin. I was always fascinated by that knocker, which seemed to have the face of a gargoyle or a dragon. The knocker was nailed onto the door by a relative a long time ago as a somewhat cobbled-together decoration that seemingly served little purpose. Until the 1980s, half the year the door had just a screen on it, so the door weathered harshly until a storm door was added that arrested the weathering.

The house was rebuilt in the 1930s after the original 1840s farmhouse burned down in a chimney fire that claimed all but my grandfather's (Robert David Jenkins's) Indian Head penny collection and the old upright player piano. I guess that was when the door was first installed. I wonder how many times I rushed to leave the house by that door—waved goodbye, went to get the mail, took the dog out, cursed the damned keyhole in the dark. I think about all the days the door has witnessed, all the hands that have burnished the knob, the time the cat got stuck between the doors, meowing in embarrassment, or the times that snow pushed its way underneath when the wind blew from the south.

The work is about potential energy. Every line in the work is off kilter a little bit, some lines are warped, and the lines almost collapse. The door itself is slightly slanted. There is an instability to the view—as if something is going to change, as if someone new might walk through the door.



10. "Portrait of the Artist's Mother"

Graphite on Panel, 48"x36"

I was inspired by Whistler's immortal portrait of his mother (Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1) for this depiction of my own dear mom. Whistler muted tones into a symphonic arrangement of silver grays, black, and white. My own portrait of Mom depicts her standing at a dilapidated henhouse approximately a hundred feet back from the family farmhouse.

Deer skulls I have picked up during my walks sit on windowsills or wherever they fell onto the floor, from nails on the wall. She holds in her hand a Serbian AKM-74-variant pistol. I had my mother pose with her finger on the trigger.

My mother has a doctorate in Engineering, which she received at a time when women were only grudgingly accepted into the engineering workplace. A tough determination—though perhaps not without questions about paths not taken—is etched into her face. Surprising as it might be, this portrait is my mother's favorite of those I have done of her.



11. “Study for Portrait of the Artist’s Mother”

Graphite on Panel, 36”x12”

I did this brief study in preparation for painting a portrait of my mother; the study probably took fifteen hours or so to accomplish. I like the juxtaposition of this work with the final as it shows some of the decisions I was making at the time. In both works—I see my mother as not the aggressor—almost like a cornered cat. Hesitant but dangerous.

My mother put up an image of a different study at her workplace, which her students refer to as “the Halloween portrait.” I wonder what they would think of this work or Portrait of the Artist’s Mother.



12. "Grandpa's Tractor"
Graphite on Panel, 18"x48"

This is a depiction of the tractor that my father first learned to drive on. In the 1980s, he needed room in the shed and drove the tractor out of the shed, leaving it outdoors to rust in the elements. Now even the Caterpillar bulldozer that he had cleared space for is dead. There is a kind of unsentimental utilitarian aspect to farming that fascinates me.

This old tractor predated the walnut tree that I grew up climbing. One early winter, I was walking up by the tractor and saw the thing sitting like a German Panzer on the way to Moscow, abandoned just off the farm road. At that moment I knew I had to draw it.



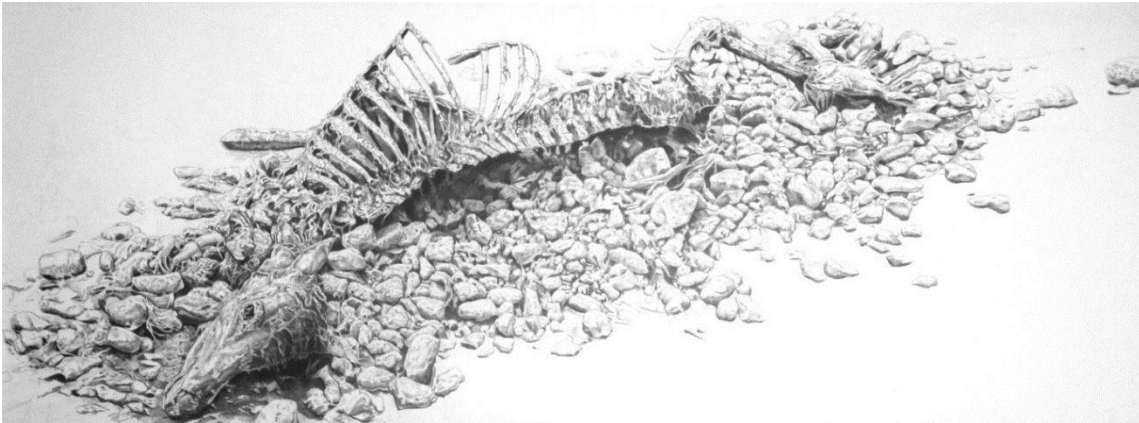
13. "She didn't Winter Well"

Graphite on Panel, 18"x48"

This is a drawing of a deer carcass that I found out on some land that the Iowa State University English Department owns. I saw the deer in the middle of stream bed from the top of a very steep gully. I had found two deer antler sheds that day and, in my excitement, started down the steep, moss-covered north hill. It was a foolhardy move, and I lost one antler in the wet leaves as I slid a hundred feet or so down the hill.

It was worth the stumble and losing that antler to get to this very large doe carcass, which was so large I first thought it to be a horse. The spring rains had dragged this deer from parts north and had submerged it until little hair remained and a rather ungodly purple-green pallor had spread over the rotted flesh. I wondered how the deer ended up here—there are too many ways to die in nature, and none of them is pleasant.

I often find deer down in waterways, possibly after a badly placed hunter's shot. I've heard that the deer becomes thirsty as it bleeds out, and so seeks water. When I drew the picture, I removed the water and left the deer as kind of large paint stroke within the picture. The eternal white flowing around the carcass to me symbolizes life, the end of life and whatever comes after.

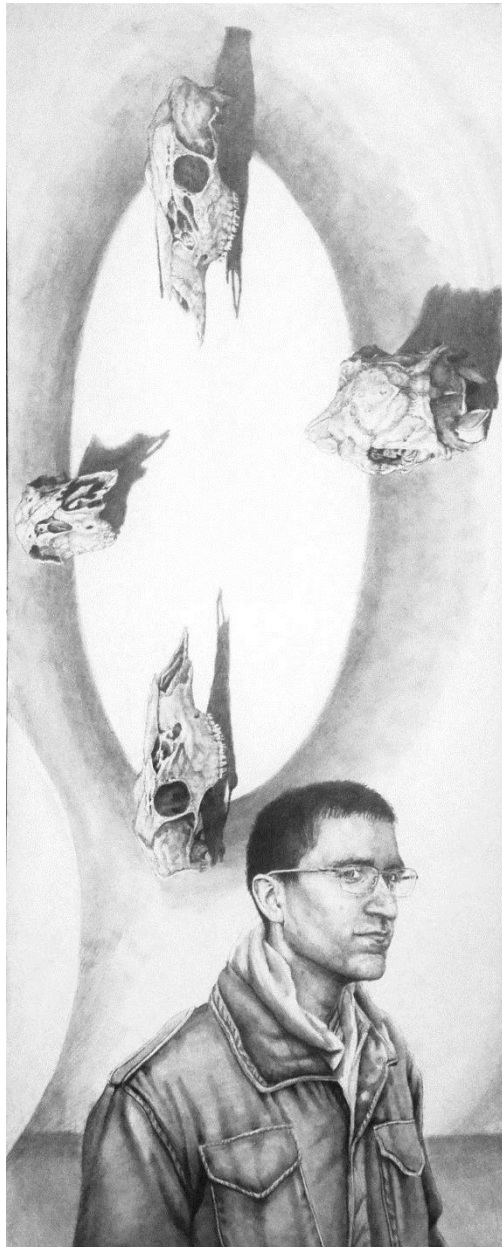


14. "Son of Lamech"

Graphite on Panel, 48"x18"

This portrait is of another friend from high school. His family was interested in taxidermy and had constructed a sort of vault in their garage with a colony of Dermestid beetles. The special beetles were kept to eat flesh off bones. The skull in the background is a deer skull that his older brother gave me when I first went to graduate school. In this piece I try to explore Magical Realism in relationship to Regionalism by juxtaposing fantastical elements with mundane. In some cases, admittedly, it is difficult to determine which is "fantastical" and which is "mundane."

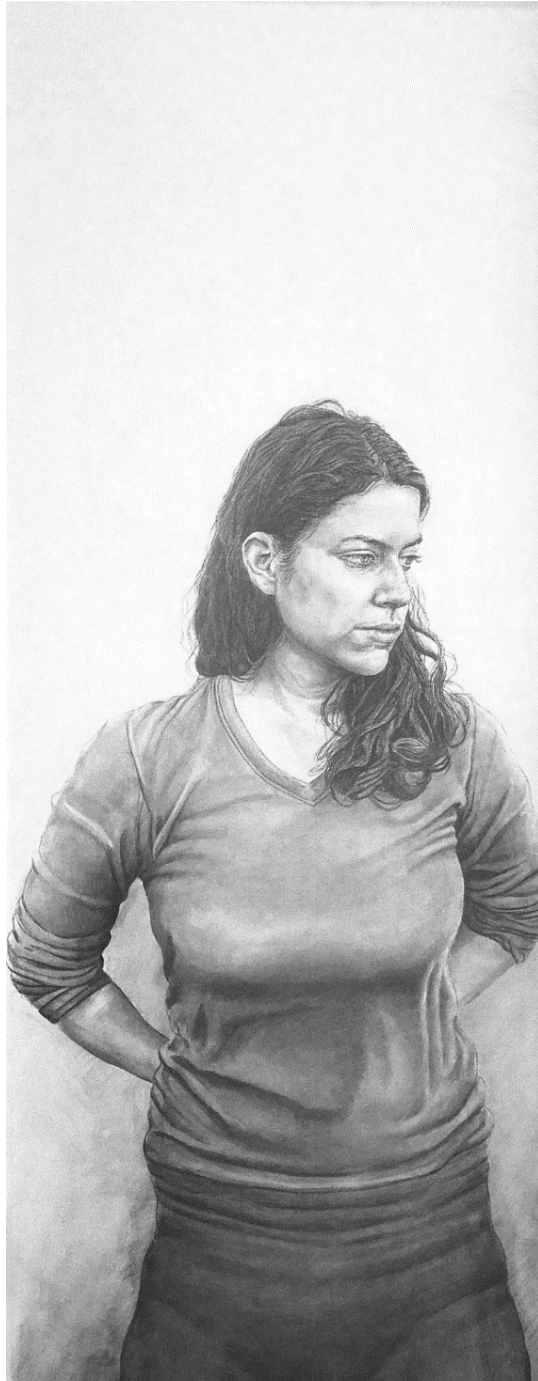
The title of the piece refers to Noah, the name of the friend who sat for the portrait.



15. "Portrait of A. P."

Graphite on Panel, 48"x18"

This is a graphite portrait of an art student I met while a graduate student here in Ames, Iowa. I have done very few portraits of people during graduate school because I feel generally I need to know a person for some time before I know the person well enough to put together a portrait of the individual that conveys anything significant or meaningful about him or her.



16. "Mosin"

Graphite on Panel, 48"x18"

This graphite drawing depicts a childhood friend of mine with his Mosin-Nagant rifle. The Mosin-Nagant is a relatively inexpensive Russian military surplus rifle, chambered 7.62x54, that is the world's longest serving military cartridge rifle, as it was developed in the 1890s. This particular Mosin-Nagant is a true Russian weapon produced in 1922 at the Tula factory and could have been used in the Winter War between Russia and Finland. A variant was used by Simo Häyhä, nicknamed "White Death" because he dressed entirely in white camouflage. He killed over 250 Soviet troops. Or perhaps the rifle could have been shouldered by a soldier on the streets of Stalingrad in the desperate fight against the Nazis. A hero of the Soviet Union, Vasily Zaytsev killed 225 Germans with a custom version of this gun. The Mosin has found its way into virtually every armed conflict since World War II, including the battlefields of Korea and Vietnam.

Who knows what stories this Russian rifle could tell if it could speak? How long did it remain crated and in storage? Was the scratch on the stock perhaps caused by a bullet striking it? And how did it end up being purchased at the Ace Hardware store in Darlington, Wisconsin, for less than a hundred bucks by a seventeen-year-old who milked cows?

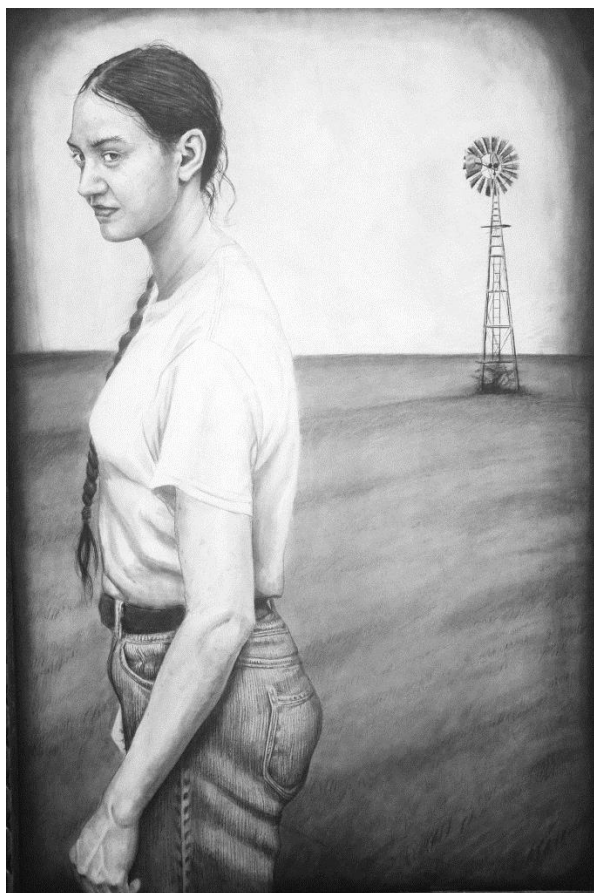


17. "Portrait of R."

Graphite on Panel, 36"x24"

This is my portrait of the sister of the young man in Memento. The entire family has astonishingly aquiline noses. This piece was inspired by Grant Wood's Victorian Survival—a portrait of the Iowa artist's quite long-necked aunt, wearing a choker; the portrait includes an old-fashioned telephone. Grant Wood painted his piece to look like an old photograph.

I went to a garage sale one summer when I was in Wisconsin and picked up an odd collection of photographs of women from the 1920s. None of the women smiled in those unlabeled and unwanted photos. I think about all those women, forever young in the photographs. In this portrait, R joins them in eternal youth.



18. "Oschter Haws"
Graphite on Panel, 72"x24"

Every single subject in this exhibit is drawn life-size (as it would appear in nature) or smaller—except the subjects in this work and *Apotheosis of Death*. In both works, the viewer's uncertainty of the true size of things permits me to fib a little about scale and get away with it.

This is a drawing of a dead rabbit I found while taking down an old shed on the family farm. The building was constructed by the Cobb canning factory in the 1950s to shelter airplanes used for spraying crops. The abandoned building collapsed entirely due to neglect more than thirty years ago. In the intervening years, an assortment of box elder and cherry trees started to pop up in the foundation. After pulling up a piece of corrugated tin, I discovered not only this carcass but also the skulls of both a skunk and an opossum within a foot of each another. Apparently, *Death* shows no favorites. The skull is depicted as I found it, with the jaws agape, a byproduct of the unseemly rotting process by which the tongue swells and pushes the jaws open.

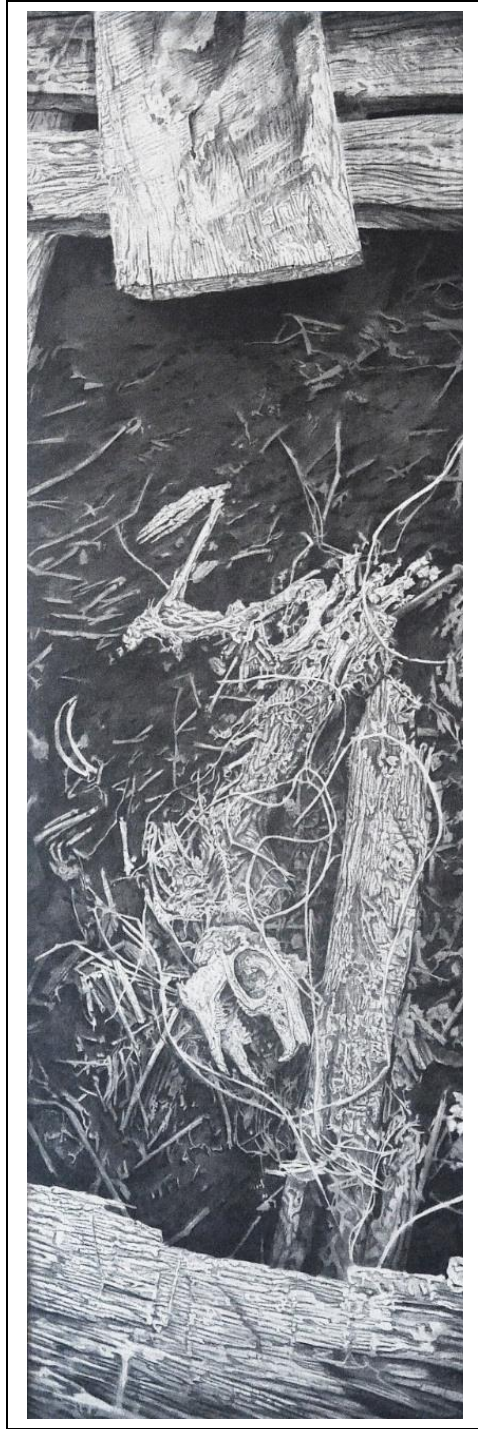
The title comes from the old German name for the Easter bunny—a large fictional hare that hides eggs. A mammal with eggs is the same archetypal trickster figure that parallels the frog god of Egypt. A god of transitions, contradictions, from water to land or, in this case, death to life.

I can't help but remember my own Easter mornings years ago, waiting up at the top of the pine staircase, to come down and search for the hidden pastel plastic eggs.

Rabbits are also signs of fertility. The rabbit reminded me strongly of my youthful Easter egg hunts. As I worked, the image of the rabbit reminded me of burials of the Princess of Ukok, the Ice Maiden unearthed in rural Siberia, and the Tomb of the Red Queen, built by the Mayans. I initially thought of ancient Egyptian Pharaoh of the First Dynasty, each buried in a costly tomb and then followed by the burial of the servants who had served him.

To me, the experience of viewing this work is like standing over an open grave.

As in most of my work, no prescribed meaning or message or explicit meta-narrative is inherent, but, as I worked, I tiptoed around a meaning. I think my motivation in this work was to give this lowly rabbit that died on the family farm a monument to document its existence and, thereby, that of all the other rabbits, possums, skunks, raccoons, weasels, mice, voles, birds, and deer with which we share the land.



19. "Easter Morning"

Acrylic Mixed Media on Panel, 24"x72"

This a return to earlier subject matter. In my undergraduate years, I drew this trailer from a different angle at a different time of the year. What has always fascinated me about this trailer is that on certain days in midsummer, when the sun is in the Northern Hemisphere—always in the late afternoon—the half-open door casts a shadow along the north-facing side of the trailer. It is like a massive sundial that symbolizes the seasons.

It is as if this 1970s trailer is as important a marker to my modern self as Stonehenge was to the ancients. The door opens through the tall, summer-dry-season grass to reveal a dimly lit interior. The shapes within hint at a darkness and decay revealed by on the exterior. But the decay comes from within. The trailer is like a cave that a Stone Age man might have had to endure a night in, in order to prove his worth facing demon-spirits, both those of the earth and those within himself. The cave is like Sunday morning on Easter when the demons of death and man's greatest fears are allayed by the emptiness of the tomb revealed in the pink light of dawn.



20. "Chair"

Graphite on Panel, 72"x 24" inches

This chair is one of the old kitchen chairs that were discarded outdoors when they became unsteady and irreparable. I remember leaning back on the rear two legs of a chair like this when I sat at the kitchen table eating dinner, as my mother scolded me. I also remember sitting hunched in one of those chairs working on homework late in the evening. Now it sits by a barn supporting a skull.

The skull is a cow skull that I found while walking a neighbor's pasture. He had sold the land but had given my family permission to roam about before the deal was finalized. I walked the quarter-mile south to the property line and then into the waterway of the Pecatonica River. The cow must have died a year or two before I found it. The flesh had all disappeared, and the coyotes that live in the rock outcroppings of a nearby quarry had also done their work. But the processes of rotting had given the grass extra nitrogen, and the surrounding wild parsnip was extra tall. I found this skull and a calf skull that day and walked about the mile back to the house with both hands full, wearing a broad grin.



21. “As the Deer Panteth”
Acrylic Mixed Media on Panel, 24”x36”

This is a deer skull—an old doe skull, to judge from the size and length of it—that I found up in a wood by the farmhouse. I love the old drywall on this building as it reminds me of a Robert Motherwell or Franz Kline painting in that the abstract patterns created are so important to the overall design of the work.

This is the same corner of the henhouse as shown in my Portrait of the Artist’s Mother. The deer skull pictured here fell from the windowsill and is included in her portrait as well. I love collecting these skulls. However, the gray squirrels that inhabit the maple trees like the calcium and so chew off bits of the skulls. You wouldn’t think you need to worry about squirrel predation, but you do.

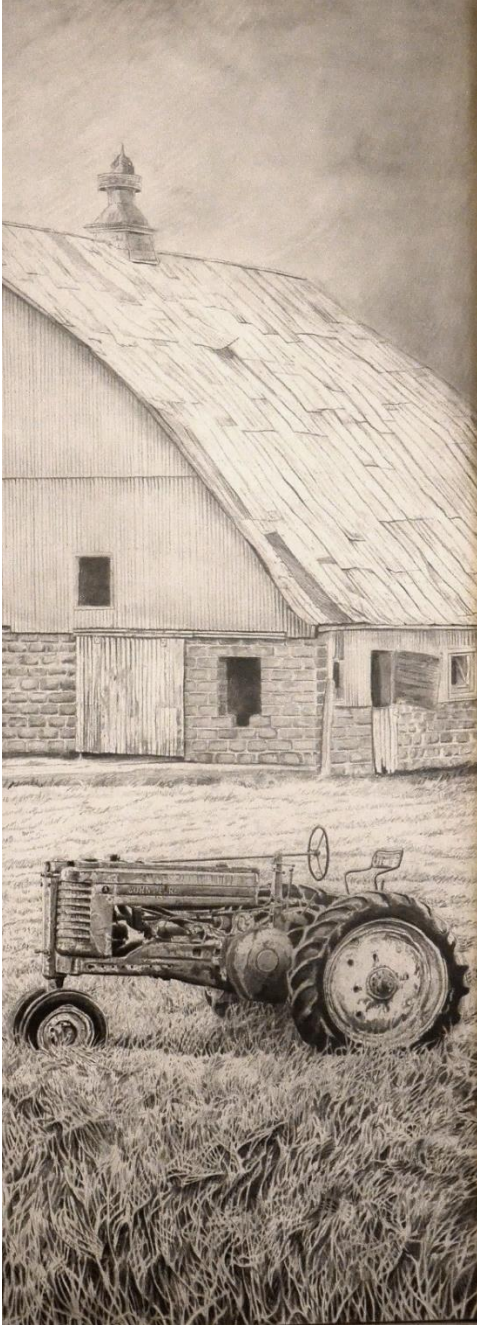


22. "Portrait of J. D."

Graphite on Panel, 48"x18"

This is a depiction of a John Deere tractor that some farmer up near Cobb, Wisconsin, left in his field. I drove by it regularly over the last couple of summers and finally decided that I needed to draw it. I was fascinated by the old barn as well, with its odd weathervane. The whole scene reminded me of an old fighter past his prime—still in the ring, still fighting, no longer against a punching foe but against the enemy of us all: time.

It is a little bucolic to mention this related detail, but when I stopped to look at the barn and tractor from the highway, a herd of white-faced Holsteins thundered up the pasture to the fence to investigate my presence.



25. "Parasite"

Graphite on Panel, 36x24 inches

This is a portrait of a dead, brown-headed cowbird which, along with a grackle, was the bane of a neighbor's existence. The brown-headed cowbird is one of the only parasitic birds of North America. These birds lay their eggs in the nests of other birds and then bully or trick the other birds into raising their young. Often if the "foster parents" destroy the interloper's eggs, the cowbirds respond by destroying the nest. Small birds often fail as foster parents, only to be killed by the cowbirds. If they "succeed," then the larger adopted babies may thrive as the smaller foster parents' own young frequently starve in the nest as they lose the battle for food to the bigger, usually older birds.

This bird was shot by a neighbor and hung up on a window as an ineffective warning to other birds.

