Live Attitude

Keith Jason Varadi
Virginia Commonwealth University

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Live Attitude

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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-All of my friends and peers
ABSTRACT

This thesis serves as an open-ended document of a young artist attempting to sift through his accumulated opinions in order to figure out what it means to accept complicity in the face of auspicious authority, rapid turnover, and paper-thin irony and nihilism, while still striving to stake a claim at something worth making and defending.
RECENT WORK

I have recently begun two new bodies of work—one dealing with the history of portraiture, still-life, and landscape through the lens of contemporary culture, the other dealing with a blue-collar understanding of the patriarchy of abstraction. In both projects, I am exploiting the tension between admiration and aversion.

In the first project, I am combining traditional painting conventions in both an allusive and elusive manner, while also addressing contemporary notions of abstract painting and advertising. Old master painters used to incorporate something for everybody—so they might have painted a nude woman lying in a beautiful landscape with some fruit and some animals frolicking somewhere in the foreground or distance, for example. This was equally a generous and a selfish act on the painters’ part, in that the painters wanted to please. But they also had various personal motives, plus they wanted praise (and money). It was also equally safe and daring in that it was safe in its submission to patrons and daring in its fanatical ambition (regarding innovation and complexity in image and scale). These painters always seemed to give their audience what they wanted, while sneaking in their own secret desires and impulses, whatever those might be. I like that. I respect that. I want to do that. I want to give something to everybody, including myself.

This notion of packing ideas and images into a painting is interesting to me because I think it is relevant to what I experience on a daily basis through my relationship with the media. But rather than packing ideas and images onto a monumental surface, I want to mash them up into one central idea/image on a smaller, relative and relatable surface, much like the size of a computer or television screen, simulating my experience of surfing the Internet or flipping through television programs. I am trying to do this by pairing varied palettes with loose and facile brushwork within a tightly contained composition in order to depict summarized facsimiles of invented and modified
representations. I want these elastic representations to sit in a mysterious, uncomfortable, yet implied place of cognition.

In the second project, I am infusing warmth, humor, and autobiography into “serious painting” such as the monochrome, geometric abstraction, and gestural abstraction, while also extracting new meaning through the use of personal narratives and references—for example, by relating the fathers and grandfathers of modern art to my actual father and his father, or perhaps to surrogate paternal figures such as Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. I can’t help having immense respect for these men. Thus, these are partially earnest tributes. But these elders are also markers of success for me and as defined by me. Their accomplishments are ones I have to deal with and process (and compete with). They have helped shape my ideas and ethics. Therefore, these works are also stark revisions or re-envisionings of art and a sense of individuality.

Examples of the first project:

No Cover, Oil on Canvas, 18” x 24”, 2010

Human Resources, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 16” x 18”, 2010
Examples of the second project:

In *No Cover*, there is what looks like a scuffed, dirtied egg or a blemished mask or perhaps even a distorted planet. At the top of the painting, there is a double strip of what could be folds, hills, or bubbles, hinting at a reverse landscape (possibly the second in the painting) or even a tablecloth (a direct reference to still-life). This disorientation within the painting questions the painting and the viewer’s understanding of the painting. The end result is the depiction of an icon of an ambiguous history.

In *Human Resources*, there is what looks like a scruffy brown hut with a deep, dark opening or a crevice. This opening is left open-ended—it is not clear whether this leads to a space within the place or to an infinite abyss. The ground and the background are both painted in flat, stereotypical Caucasian flesh tones, suggesting that the scruffy material that comprises the hut is human hair and furthermore, that the hut and opening is the pubic region of a woman. The ground and background are indeterminate—they could either be part of a generalized landscape or still-life set up. When I conceived of this painting, I had Gustave Courbet’s *The Origin of the World* in mind and I wanted to make my own sly nod to it when I executed the painting.
DAD and PAP were the first intentional efforts at the second of the two newest projects. With these, I wanted to get to the point in terms of the action, color, composition, and materials. With both, I found two specifically generic fabrics that I felt could best represent and depict my father and grandfather, simply and beautifully, but could also hopefully elicit a similar sentiment with the viewer, thus making them more of pseudo-portraits somewhat derivative of those taken at a place like Sears. So with DAD, I stretched a blue chambray fabric (the material used to make business dress shirts and Wrangler cowboy shirts). And with PAP, I stretched a gray tweed fabric that was woven with blues and pinks throughout (the material used to make both sofas and cheap sports coats back in the 1970s and 1980s).

Another example of this second body of work:

Nut Shot, Silkscreen on Acrylic Paint on Canvas, 10” x 8”, 2011

Nut Shot is a silkscreen painting (actually, I made three) based on a newspaper photo clipping of my father playing high school baseball. The caption reads: “IN PAIN…Boyle
Pitcher Keith Varadi slouches in pain after being hit with a pitch in the sixth inning of Tuesday’s 14-5 Lancer victory.” My father was a star pitcher in high school, went on to play in college, and garnered interest from multiple professional teams, but had injured his knee in college and opted out of continuing to play after that.

Growing up, I remember my father having a scrapbook of all of his collected baseball achievements, but I especially remember this one image. Everything about it seemed to be perfect for me to synthesize and illustrate a lot of what I have been talking about up to this point. Upon going back to this photo, everything about it—the composition, the caption, the lack of fans in the stands, the lone individual walking behind the fence, the way my father is bent over, the way the opposing catcher is looking, the position of the umpire—all seemed to capture an exact illusive moment that feels like it could have been a personal premonition.

Looking now at the transformation that occurred due to my intervention of making the clipping an artwork, I feel like Marty McFly from Back to the Future. There is a simultaneous expansion and collapse of time in the work that is very significant for me. It is not quite clear when this photo was taken, when the painting was made, or if that is me or someone else in the photo. It is the first time I have made something that has had this sort of effect on me. When I began developing the idea for this second project, I immediately thought about this image and asked my dad for it. He complied without question. He had no problem with me making multiple paintings of him getting hit in the crotch by an opposing pitcher.

I believe that an image of a young man being harmed in the stereotypical symbolic place of power for a male while in the act of sport, an activity of such reverence for so many other young males is a powerful one. There is compounded power when it is revealed that the person being harmed has the same name as the artist who is presenting the image. The power, for me, comes from the acknowledgment of defeat and deflation in the hope of success and adoration.
I made three of these paintings to speak to the multiplicity of the printed image, the distribution of media, the three rivers of Pittsburgh, and to give one to my father and one to my godfather (his best friend and catcher), while keeping one for myself. I also used black ink, grey acrylic paint, and halftones to make an obvious reference to Andy Warhol, who also was born in Pittsburgh and is clearly a major influence on my work. In fact, I worked at The Andy Warhol Museum for two years before going to Rutgers University for my undergraduate studies. Hopefully, all of these factors in flux illustrate more literally what other examples such as DAD and PAP might not be able to on their own—homage vs. rebellion through somewhat of a forced distance.

Since I have just recently begun both of these projects, I am still working through a lot of the inherent issues with taking on such grand projects that have already gone through the historical wash. These are both long-term interests of mine that I will likely, hopefully continue to struggle with and that will gradually lead to even more supple projects. The wealth of challenges and inevitable shortcomings are what keep me wanting to carry forth.

With the first project, I am simultaneously taking on over five hundred years of painting, the economics of art, legibility, and personal compromise, which is obviously a daunting task. Shrinking the picture plane and reducing realism are my impulses to personally deal with this content I am working with within the context of my understanding of the current state of the art world and its place within society. However, I am also cautious and anxious about my impulses. Sometimes I worry that these paintings of mine are too subtle, humble, and closed-in. Sometimes I worry that all the cultural and painterly codes and symbols that I load them with will get lost and they’ll just look like pretty cool abstract paintings. I don’t want them to just look pretty cool or to just look like abstract paintings. I haven’t quite worked my way out of this dilemma, but lately, I have been trying to connect the dots and locate myself within a wider group of semi-related painters to try to better understand the dilemma.
I think of two recent notable painters, Dana Schutz and Nicole Eisenman, who have gained success for exploring what I see as somewhat shared interests with me. Both painters have focused their interests, done their research, and built extensive vocabularies for themselves. It is clear to me that through rigorous and vigorous practice, they have proven great prowess and dexterity and shown their painterly chops and painterly smarts.

In the painting, *How We Would Give Birth*, Schutz paints a woman giving birth to a legless infant on a strange hospital bed. It is unclear if she is giving birth in a hospital, or actually in a museum or in her house. Next to the angular bed, there is a dresser with a box of tissues, in case the artist needs a good cry. On the purple painted wall, next to the dresser, right at the woman’s eye level, there is what looks like a Hudson River School painting or a replica of an original. This distinction is not obvious due to the gaudy frame within which the painting is displayed, which is how paintings are framed both in museums and households. The woman is painted alone, toes clenched and grasping the bed rail, yet peacefully staring at the bucolic mirage of the sublime through the window of a painting while the deformed baby bloodily squeezes out of her stretched vagina.

Schutz manages to include portraiture, still-life, and landscape into one painting. Beyond that, she is offering a valid and candid entry into her insecurities and anxieties, and perhaps reality. We can endlessly stare at master paintings and they can inform us and impress us. We can find odd comfort in refusing to be a cheap knockoff. But either way, in comparison to someone like Church or Cole or even to their imitators, our paintings will always look deformed. The sentiments of this painting are ones I share daily with Schutz and she nailed it. Now I not only have to deal with and come to terms with Church and Cole, I have to deal with and come to terms with Schutz (as well as her feminist predecessors such as Frida Kahlo and Alice Neel).
Dana Schutz, *How We Would Give Birth*, Oil on Canvas, 60" x 72", 2007

Nicole Eisenman, *Winter Solstice 2012 Dinner Party*, Oil on Canvas, 56" x 44", 2009
In *Winter Solstice 2012 Dinner Party*, Eisenman too manages to include portraiture, still-life and landscape in one painting. And she treats each element of the painting with craft and cleverness. Each figure is sloppily painted as if it is dead, dying, undead, drunk, or on drugs. The table is sparse, with few things to eat, but plenty to drink. Ironically, the only food left on the table is grapes and the only drink on the table is wine. One is made from the other and fruit, grapes included, are used as symbols for sex and enough wine will make most of us want to have sex (or not be able to have sex). In contrast with the way the figures are painted, the table is painted neat and clean, with some precision. The background’s perspective is skewed and is painted somewhat indiscriminately. The sky-lit skyline has just enough details.

The figures are all at a creepy dinner party where they’re eerily chatting, flirting, and toasting. The painting’s title points to the end of the world and it being a painting makes me think of “The End of Painting,” a lame duck argument that seemingly pops up every other decade. Both of these issues are ones that I constantly consider and contend with—the absurd pressing worries of mortality and the legitimacy of painting. Within the painting, Eisenman makes slight references to many big names of Modernism—Vuillard, Bonard, Lautrec, Van Gogh, Ensor, Matisse. She tightly packs information into just about every inch of the medium sized canvas, yet there is room to breathe and move about the painting. She manipulates the clichés of good and bad painting with aptitude in order to balance chaos and order in the face of Armageddon.

Both of these painters continue to keep me on my toes, surprising me with each new painting and exhibition, while never entirely departing from their focused inquiries. Both of these painters are better painters than me. And since I am not interested enough in tackling painting alone, I will never be able to match their skills. Therefore, I must rely on my ideas, wits, and hard drive memory just to try to compete at all. Seeing as they are both super smart, witty, and filled with art historical knowledge, I have quite a challenge ahead of me, but one I am up for, nonetheless. The main difference for me between what I am attempting and what these two painters have been doing is that I want to
condense the already set up clichés and constructs of painting. I want to re-construct and re-contextualize what I know and perceive within history, art history, the world, and the art world as opposed to depicting these tropes within a received set of “art rules.”

With the second project, I am thus far, loading personal narrative into conceptualism and minimalism, a not so unfamiliar act in the art world at this point. Artists have been injecting symbolism into the assumed emptiness of the monochrome or fabricated forms for decades—take, Olivier Mosset or Janine Antoni, for example. Mosset has made the cool color swatches of someone like Ellsworth Kelly warm and funny in pieces such as “Fridge.” Antoni has made the stark cubes of Donald Judd human and weathered in “Gnaw.”

In “Fridge,” Mosset takes two olive-painted canvases, one a horizontally aligned rectangle and the other a vertically aligned rectangle, and makes a stacked painting, matter-of-factly resembling a refrigerator. It is a subtly hilarious gesture that makes minimalism become pseudo-realism, taking an art idea based off of design that was then re-appropriated by design and collapses the two on themselves. In “Gnaw,” Antoni has 600 pounds of chocolate and 600 pounds of lard made into cubes resembling the forms that defined the origins of minimalist sculpture and then literally gnawed into them until she no longer could withstand the activity. Not only does this piece combat the early stages of the male-dominated Minimalist movement by engaging in the stereotypes of desire and appearance, it makes sculpture a performative act, allowing the artist to initially be in control and dominate the sculpture, only to have the sculpture eventually buck back and overwhelm and consume her, much as a minimalist art work is so often approached.
So what can I add to this lineage of artists working in this post-conceptual, post—minimalist manner? Well, I am a young, straight, middle-class, white, male artist, who has primarily been making paintings thus far in my life. This may be an insignificant piece of information to some, but I am trying to deal with what this actually means in a way that is as profound and sensitive as possible. I know that my not-so-interesting or unique “identity” at once means a great deal of privilege for myself, but it also gives me a lot of stress and anxiety. As a person in my position, I am automatically granted a lot of opportunities I might not otherwise be given. I am also subject to a certain amount of scrutiny I might not otherwise be subject to, some of which is self-imposed, for sure. I realize I run the risk of being lame or corny by even discussing any of this in my thesis, but this tension often soaks my thoughts when creating any work of art.

Just the idea of being a man and what that means now in relation to what it has meant in the past is frightening to think about. Males have been oppressors and I am not excluded from the effects of this oppression. I want to refrain from sustaining this oppression. I want to be thoughtful and mindful without being patronizing. However, I
want to maintain my sense of humor, which often somehow seems to be lost in the process of figuring these heavy things out.

Like artists such as Olivier Mosset and Janine Antoni, among others, I believe I am trying to use the language of minimalism and conceptualism to connect myself to something bigger, to others, and other issues. At this point, I am narrowing in on specific personal issues and narratives—myself, my family, my hometown, etc. But as I move forward, I know that if I really want to achieve what I want with these works on the scale I want and articulate my ideas as accurately as I imagine them in my head, I am going to have to go outside of this obvious outward extension. I need to go outside of myself and accept that at this point, I am not exactly who I think I am and that my allegiance to where I came from is just an illusion created for me which, up to this point, I have accepted.

PREVIOUS WORK

Everything I make comes from or deals with something specific from my daily life. It’s a give and take, back and forth activity. I think of this activity as somewhere between playing Frisbee and throwing a boomerang. Sometimes, I catch ideas, absorb them, and throw them back, and so on and so forth. Other times, I come up with ideas and throw them out into the world, they slice through the air, and come back to me in order to be recycled.

In Back In Black, I pasted an old cover of Art News featuring Frank Stella onto a panel, then painted a black square painting similar to one of his early works beneath his fingers (which previously held a lit cigar). In the photo, he looks like a corny caricature of Groucho Marx, wearing an ushanka and smiling like a doofus, only now he is dangling a false reminder (albeit a miniature one) of his acclaimed past. This painting illustrates this tension between admiration and aversion and is perhaps a great jumping off point for the projects described above. In Self-Absorbed Painting, a hyper-saturated American
flag becomes a narcissistic exclamation, spelling out “ME ME ME.” In *Strange Sentiment*, I extracted all of the colors from the Pittsburgh Paints logo. In both instances, I have re-appropriated and re-contextualized two familiar logos—one of my country and one of a corporation based in my hometown—and made them into personal icons.

In *Teen Mom*, I stretched an old shirt previously belonging to my girlfriend and stuffed it with a garbage bag. I have a feeling this piece is probably confusing for some, as it has been somewhat confusing for me. It’s not quite a criticism or a condemnation of teen pregnancy, nor is it quite a tongue-in-cheek either. At one point, I think I was trying to make some sort of disdainful commentary on the way teen pregnancy has been treated both by MTV and the government. But there was something silly and sinister about the piece, which deflates any sort of real “statement.” At this point, what I really think is that it’s kind of an ironic instance of me basically pointing at something, reinforcing a reality—yes, teen pregnancy occurs.

But this makes me think about how I actually am different than an MTV producer exploiting unfortunate circumstances or a politician trying to remove sex education from schools or shutting down Planned Parenthood clinics. First of all, I never had any intense moral motives or malicious intentions driving the piece; I am simply made curious by my perceived state of this issue in America and how a piece like this might make me or anyone who would see it feel. Second of all, I think maybe just by pointing at the fact that teen pregnancy occurs is more productive than protesting an abortion clinic or writing MTV producers or politicians a letter. Maybe people just need to be reminded. Maybe I should leave these issues up to people who can actually do something. Maybe I’m giving myself a pass. I hope not.

This leads me to the discussion of another core element of these works, which is the question of value. I most definitely do not believe value is determined simply by size, materials, time, cost, production, reputation, or any of the other accepted historical
markers of value in art history. I have been and am continuing to challenge these notions as much as I see fit through various means of exploiting these historical markers. However, I must say that I am not interested in mere radical, reactionary gestures for the sake of opposition, such as the whirlwind fad of street artists or some of the most recent “bad boys” of Manhattan—Dan Colen or Nate Lowman, for example. I find the tactics used by these artists to be boring and often yield marginal results. I am more interested in employing more nuanced approaches and I will do my best to explain the particulars of what I feel to be at stake in art and specifically, in my own art.

One way in which I have been trying to get at this idea of value has been through installation. I have gone through various ways of thinking about displaying my work, including installing in a sort of scattershot manner, a pseudo-salon style, semi-traditionally, as well as a sparse to barely there method. I have yet to find a way that I am satisfied with. I don’t know if I ever want to be satisfied though. I don’t know what that would mean. But I do know that I want to be more resolved in the connection between the meaning of the work and the meaning of the installation, as I am learning how key that connection is for my work, in particular, to really carry it’s full weight.
Images of the above-mentioned works:

*Back In Black*, Oil on Magazine Cover on Panel, 9” x 12”, 2010

*Self-Absorbed Painting*, Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 22” x 18”, 2010

*Strange Sentiment*, Oil on Canvas, 16” x 20”, 2010

*Teen Mom*, Stretched and Stuffed Fabric, 12” x 16”, 2011
FOUNDATION AND CONTEXT

A lot of the work I have been discussing is about finding my own personal place in a culturally confused society. I think there is a real bipolar dynamic to the way America operates. For example, America will open its borders to anyone from any country, yet once an individual becomes a member of the population, he or she is basically forced to self-segregate, at least for a period of time. I also think there are a lot of ironies in America. For example, America is the first country to provide aid to any country in need of a natural disaster, yet it is the first to attack any country whose policies it disagrees with. It is also a country embroiled with bitter hostility about race issues, yet it is the only country that would elect a minority president. I want to try to excavate the truly weird paradoxes in the cracks and crevices where these ironies slip into and fester.

I believe that these moments of slippage can be very telling about the way we are developing as a global society. To look at the minor moments in order to analyze and reflect on the bigger picture is crucial for me. I am continually in search of the peculiar places where these moments occur and I think they are sort of the nexus of cultural crossover. I am fascinated by how and why different segments of society can find comfort in uncomfortable realms of reality television, social media, blogs and message boards, Internet dating, and inconsequential memes. These are tools, devices, and metaphors used as markers for perhaps some greater shift.

I think that we, as a whole, are placing too much of an emphasis on these minor moments without analysis and reflection. I think we are distancing ourselves from ourselves, our fellow persons, our surroundings and any actual feelings or opinions. There is a paper-thin feeling of irony and nihilism taking over. Thus, we are neglecting what is happening on a greater scale. By being distracted by the trivial nature of television today, the constant floods of Internet updates, viral clips and blips, and a communal avoidance of the lack of actual journalism being written and disseminated in most of the world, we are ridding ourselves of the right of being in touch at all and
blinding ourselves of the corruption of power and authority rapidly spreading. It seems as if people today are more than willing to lose their identity in order to acquire a new service or account, regardless of how trite or useless it really might be. This is less of a judgment and more of a curious observation.

Again, I am not interested in some sort of radical or reactionary stance though. I am more interested in recognizing this trend, admitting that I too am somewhat complicit, and pinpointing these slippages and manipulating them to my gain and ultimately, to a greater gain. I think there is a common urge or impulse that is very difficult to resist (and is also hard to name or place) that is tied to these things. We get sucked in. There’s a drama. There’s a hook. Typically, these things are nothing more than an e-mail blast or water cooler talk and the next day, it’s old news. And if you are late to be in the know, you feel left out and bummed out. But at their best, these things can be tender, they can be reaffirming, they can be unifying.

There is something about the current air that strengthens my existentialist leanings. It’s like the more we sift through the details and understand what seems to be an aloof drifting to the precipice of an oncoming monumental disaster, perhaps we can get back to believing in the power of humanity or the power of something, anything. I, personally, don’t want to sulk in the darkness of “everything has been done.” The now seemingly remote idea of someone or something potentially being unique cannot crumble. It cannot be tucked under a rock somewhere.

But to think of making paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, films, or videos or writing poetry, literature, or songs in the face of this quick turnover with which everything else in the world passes is disheartening. I feel like all artists of any kind today are sad, feeble salmon swimming against the strongest toxic current possible. So lately, I have been thinking of the things I make as markers, just like all of the other things that pass by in the world right now. But, of course, I want these things to have some extra
ingredient, some extra punch that allows for them to flicker and resonate for much longer than these fleeting moments.

INFRINGEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

I was attacked and hospitalized in the spring of 2008, and this forceful physical harm has since made me consider communication and personal infringement more carefully. This analysis and manipulation of passive, aggressive, and passive-aggressive intellectual infringement (rather than physical infringement) is extremely integral to my work and perspective. I am interested in the ways in which certain words, symbols, colors, or patterns when used in isolation or combination can trigger reactions from people and elicit powerful mental or even physical responses from other individuals. This happens in advertising (i.e. sex appeal in Victoria’s Secret and American Apparel commercials or advertisements), urban planning (i.e. the disorientation caused by one-way streets and roundabouts), interior design (i.e. the psychological effects of colors on purchasing in places of commerce), and other disciplines, and it can happen in art. I am interested in using the tactics of these other disciplines and others by employing them in my work, both through actually executing them in individual pieces and in the installation of a group of pieces.

I am especially interested in how this trigger-activity functions in America, or at least the America I have experienced and encountered—in person, in print, on television, through stories, etc. I am often reminded of the constant bombardment of sound and imagery in my country (or the idea of a country I have created and mapped out for myself), whether through the media or just walking down the street. But I am training myself to even more acutely observe what is happening and how it is affecting me. In doing so, I think I can more adeptly understand my reactions and responses, not only to these cultural campaigns, but also within my interpersonal interactions and relationships and removed perceptions of myself and my communities (on any scale).
My work documents these observations in a way that is influenced by the charisma and investigative research of Peter Jennings, the colloquial and conversational yet fragmented storytelling of Hunter S. Thompson, the enduring fervor of Werner Herzog, the piss-and-vinegar attitude of Charles Bukowski, the absurd derailment and embrace of seemingly dim-witted one-liners of Mitch Hedburg, and the eccentric emblematic touch of Norman Rockwell. All of these men embraced who they are or were, what they stand or stood for, and their place in society. Though actually strangers, they have cultivated a sense of themselves so that people can somehow feel they know them. I haven’t quite figured any of these things out for myself just yet. But through the process of attempt and failure, I am slowly making my way towards a better, clearer understanding.

HINGED ON DISJOINTEDNESS

I have Rheumatoid Arthritis. This sometimes determines how I make work and the scale in which I make it. I willfully choose when and where to focus these knacks and the clumsiness that results from my disability. I recognize the obstacles inherent in making art and perhaps due to my own physical obstacles, I purposely create new mental ones to contend with. These obstacles force me to be as direct and concise as possible as I generate images and statements. Nevertheless, I want the images and statements to be as expansive and elusive as possible.

I think some of this activity has to do with my own stubbornness—a trait I often don’t like to admit to. I recognize my stubbornness in trying to contend with my disability, but I also recognize my stubbornness in trying to contend with painting, the history of painting, and the possibilities of what a painting can potentially do and how it might function at this point in time. Painting is always continuing to recycle through ups and downs, moments of championship and criticism, and embrace and abandonment. Perhaps this is a result of the difficulty of actually being able to make a painting work out the way an artist wants it to (in all the conventional ways of form, color, composition,
etc.). But perhaps this is also due, in part, to trying to make a painting worthy of existing at all.

Many of my favorite artists—Bruce Nauman, Mike Kelley, Al Taylor, John Baldessari—all started out as painters and eventually gave up on the act of painting. I constantly question why I make paintings or why I should make paintings and because of this, I search for excuses or justifications for anything I conceive of as an idea for a painting. I am curious as to whether or not I can do what these artists failed to do—that is, to be able to continually find reasons to articulate myself through the format of painting or “painting,” as painting now has a range of definitions. At the same time, I am curious as to whether or not I can achieve a similar type of sophistication in the push-pull dynamic between tasteful elegance and crass agitation that they all exude in their work.

With time, I have become especially full of doubt and skepticism in terms of my own relationship to painting. Over time, the relationship has loosened and become one in which I am learning that despite my stubbornness as a painter, painting might just be a tool that I have been relying on as a way to communicate my ideas. However, as much as I am still making paintings and am interested in continuing this pursuit of painting, I think it will continue to be just a tool. And I want to continue to further sharpen and develop the other tools I use (writing and music, for example) and better utilize them, while also adding to my toolbox, or perhaps, even better stated, my bag of tricks.
KEITH J. VARADI
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EDUCATION
2011
MFA, Painting and Printmaking, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

2008
BFA Magna Cum Laude, Painting and Printmaking w/ English minor, Mason Gross
School of the Arts at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

SOLO AND TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS
2011
Live Attitude, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA
Gin and Tonic, The Joanna, Houston, TX (with Michael Kennedy Costa)
2010
Economics, Locker 50b, Richmond, VA
Cloak Wheel, Public Space One, Iowa City, IA
2009
You All Freed Men, A Clean Poorly Lighted Space, Menomonie, WI

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2011
In Between The Sheets, Harlem Work Space, New York, NY
Exit Strategy, White Box, New York, NY
North American Graduate Art Survey, Katherine E. Nash Gallery, University of
Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
The Wrong Miracle, Galeria NoMiNIMO, Guayaquil, Ecuador

2010
We’re All In This Together, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Dudes, FAB Gallery, Richmond, VA
Irresistible Apparatus, 8 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA
Almost Famous, Reynolds Gallery, Richmond, VA
Burns Slower, SPACE Gallery, Portland, ME (Three-person exhibition with Tisch
Abelow and Michael Kennedy Costa)
Exit Light, Reference Gallery, Richmond, VA
666666 Darth Gray, The Summit, Richmond, VA
Anti-Anti/Non-Non, Hal Bromm Gallery, New York, NY
Hood Rich, The Hexagon Space, Baltimore, MD
Collections, FAB Gallery, Richmond, VA
New Waves, Contemporary Art Center of Virginia, Virginia Beach, VA

2009
Peace Poster (GIFTLAND), Printed Matter, New York, NY
Pseudonymous, The Dirty Dirty, Brooklyn, NY
Richmond Zine Fest, Gallery 5, Richmond, VA
Contemporary Painting, Ford Hall, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI
Round One, FAB Gallery, Richmond, VA
Panel Discussion, The Dirty Dirty, Brooklyn, NY
Tails, Red Mill Gallery, Johnson, VT
Analogous, Runnels Gallery, Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, NM
2008
The Fungusamongus, The Dirty Dirty, Brooklyn, NY
Third Coast National, K Space Contemporary, Corpus Christi, TX
Doppelganger, Mason Gross Galleries, New Brunswick, NJ
New Jersey Zine Fest, Douglass Student Center, New Brunswick, NJ
Gesamtkunstwerk!, Mason Gross Galleries, New Brunswick, NJ
Island, CUNY-The College of Staten Island, Staten Island, NY
What The Folk?, UAG Gallery, Albany, NY

READINGS
2011
Moveable Feast, Visual Arts Center, Richmond, VA
Sponge HQ, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA
PAPA, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

PROJECTS
Curator, For Your Health, Sponge HQ, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA
Co-curator, Exit Light, Reference Gallery, Richmond, VA
Mix Tape Free Draw, Free Art School, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

AWARDS/HONORS
2011
Residency, Edward F. Albee Foundation, Montauk, NY
VCU Arts Graduate Travel Grant, Houston, TX
Nominee, Joan Mitchell Foundation MFA Grant
VCU Graduate Thesis/Dissertation Award, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
2010
VCU Arts Graduate Travel Grant, Portland, ME
Lillian and Nat Reiss Scholarship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
VCU Arts Graduate Travel Grant, Iowa City, IA
2009
Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Residency and Grant, Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT
2005-2008
Dean's List (Every Semester), Mason Gross School of the Arts, New Brunswick, NJ
UNIVERSITY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2010
Adjunct Professor, Advanced Painting and Drawing, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Adjunct Professor, Intermediate Painting and Drawing, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Guest Lecturer, Critical Issues Seminar, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Adjunct Professor, Basic Painting, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

2009
Teaching Assistant, Basic Painting, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Teaching Assistant, Concepts and Issues, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

OTHER EXPERIENCE

2011
Graduate Student Mentor, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Program Leader, Art 180 at Elkhardt Middle School, Richmond, VA

2010
Graduate Student Mentor, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Program Leader, Art 180 at Elkhardt Middle School, Richmond, VA
Artist Educator, St. Andrew's School, Richmond, VA

2009
Guest Arts Instructor, Johnson Elementary School, Johnson, VT

2003-2005
Assistant, Education and Visitor Services, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA