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WE ARE ALL EGGS

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WE ARE ALL EGGS



PAINTING & DRAWING MFA THESIS 2024

BY: AMARA EKE

Abstract

As my time at the University of Washington is winding down to a bittersweet end, my practice in my second year has led me to intensify an already bright color palette and intentionally artificial materiality to capture and consume viewers' attention. With striking aesthetics, I strive to maintain the sacred goal of compelling an audience to linger and explore, giving my paintings more than a passing glance.

I draw inspiration from late Byzantine mosaics, allegorical paintings from the Renaissance, and visionary artwork by Hilma af Klint. I aspire to create similar impacts of awe, rumination, and awakening through my colorful, playful, cartoon-like stylization.

My current body of work seeks to connect humanity to creating a prophecy by boiling down complex ideas, forms, and concepts to their most basic unit, which is the symbol of the egg. I use artificial, plastic-looking colors to contrast the divine, paying homage to the new gods that have emerged under the vindictive and compelling theocracy of capitalism and other systemic structures within modern society.

The delicious artificiality of acrylic paint, paired with my internal desire to create an all-inclusive, self-contained world where everyone can joyfully coexist, manifests itself into something that has the opportunity to become real and, therefore, is more than a dream. Amidst real-world chaos, madness, and confusion, my ambition is to create beams of joy through my art to offset the mundane and operate as a catalyst to envision a brighter, kinder, loving, and, most of all, delightful future.

Studio notes/influences from critique

Since the beginning of my studio practice, specifically in Seattle for my MFA degree, my transition from small, intimate works on sketchbooks (due to no studio access over the

pandemic) has boomed into complete wall-sized paintings. However, on every scale, I strive to create a visual language in addition to a maker's mark or style with repeating motifs, patterns, color palettes, and subjects. Creating a unique stylization has been one of the most important goals I have focused on as an artist. I believe it is the purest testament and the truest dedication to the contribution to the canon of art and art history to individualize yourself among the millions of artworks existing as we know it and be identified by your unique visual cadence. As I additionally have an academic background in Art History, specifically 15-16th century Italian Renaissance and late Byzantine periods, I have familiarized myself with the importance of composition, visual rhythm, iconography, staple, motif, and characterization in a way that propels viewers beyond the work and into imaginative realms.

Adding a grander space to create has heavily influenced my work after my first quarter in Fall 2022. As I was trying to illustrate vast spacescapes within the confines of an 11x14(+)” sketch pad, working exponentially larger allowed my style to evolve and become an exploration of world-building, character design, and creating my visual cosmology.



Bang! Bang! Bang! (2022)

The critiques I have received thus far have made me consider new ways to handle paint, especially in color and material. Though I love a rainbow palette, my rainbow has become more intentional through conversations with faculty about how to shift the mood I am trying to convey through more color specificity.

We Are All Eggs

For my latest body of work, the bulk of my thesis, I have chosen to revolve my art-making around the egg. Throughout my entire art practice, especially in abstract works, the egg would appear randomly in the mix of all the other loops, checkerboards, and rainbows. I started focusing on the icon of the egg itself because I had been subconsciously throwing it into drawings and paintings and decided to bring its meaning to fruition.

The egg symbolizes unrealized potential, a blank, round object containing an entire world, ecosystem, or spirit. I have found myself identifying and relating closely to the egg because of its simplicity in its overall form and complexity in its function to germinate itself to life. Eggs are ideas that have not been hatched yet, and with someone who has thousands of ideas a day, the egg helps reduce the overwhelming volume to neat units of 0, which also conveniently makes the shape of an egg. In the context of artmaking in tandem with completing my master's degree in fine arts, the symbology and worldliness of the egg have prompted my artistic focus to delve deeper into what this unique little object has to offer, especially in terms of its mimetic qualities which echo throughout language, nature, and the universe itself uniting humanity through similarities rather than separating us through our differences.

As far as my current body of work goes, my thesis first revolves around questioning the simplicity of the egg (and chickens), specifically through American language and colloquialisms.

Initially, I asked myself the age-old question: “What came first, the chicken or the egg?” This question has been repeated throughout history in various contexts. It seems to purport itself as its facet in popular culture, similar to the question, “Why did the chicken cross the road?” (To get to the other side.) The jokey simplicity of these sayings challenged me to find their deeper meanings through acrylic painting on a large scale.



To Get to the Other Side (2023)

Not only is the symbol of a round white or brown egg a motif in my work but more so the image of a fried egg with a bright, bubbly, yellow-orange center surrounded by a puddle of whitish, goopy yolk. The fried egg serves as more of a unifying symbol because it is a circle within a circle in its most basic form. This representation allows more access to constructing mimesis in natural and conceptual forms. For example, one of my paintings I completed over the summer of 2023 (which prompted my thesis work going forward) titled “What Came First?” works as a diagram highlighting the unifying qualities between naturally occurring forms in

nature, humans, concepts, and the universe with the fried egg motif as a binder holding them all together as means to get closer to finding an answer. A flower with roots echoes the form of a neuron and its synapses; an atom with electrons resembles the form of a “biblically accurate” angel made of interlocking rings and eyeballs; a strand of DNA mimics two snakes in love intertwined with each other. By representing all of these forms on the same scale, my goal is to bring to light that even on micro and macro scales, there is an undeniable coincidence of likeness and synchronicity occurring within the same natural geometry and sacred design rippling throughout the universe. The fried egg acts as a clue or an “easter egg," accentuating the uniformity and parallels within intricate forms and concepts.



What Came First? (2023)

The egg is sturdy yet fragile at the same time. Its hard and delicate outer shell encapsulates the object within. It must be nurtured with the proper care to grow and eventually

leave its outside behind, similar to babies or animals being born. The egg resembles something inside us all that seeks care, love, warmth, and shelter to later possess the potential to become a greater version of its current self. Incubation is another concept I have pondered, as I have made the egg a staple in my art because incubating means producing. The entirety of my time here at the University of Washington has felt like an incubation period like no other, where I produce, produce, produce until an opportunity presents itself where the work can leave the confines of my studio (nest) and be free to take the outside world by storm. Incubation represents all the work occurring behind the scenes, which people only get to see once the time is ripe for the innards of the shell to become a fully cooked concept inhabiting spaces beyond its birthplace. One of my pieces, which took the longest to make because its construction was reliant on an exploration of materials, allowed me to meditate on process rather than solely content and narrative.

“Master Incubator” is a large, geometric painting resembling a stained glass window with reference to Gothic cathedral architecture. The 8-pointed star grid of even smaller stars holds 52 unhatched eggs against a rainbow collage of fragments to serve as that stained glass illusion. The central egg yolks are made of air-dry clay, painted with acrylic, and sealed with gloss medium. The whites of the eggs are a mixture of clear gel medium, acrylic paint, gloss medium, and a dusting of glitter to finish it off. The space between the yolk and its shell is a painted black void with black velvet stars applied on top, alluding to an entire unawakened universe inside the egg. The egg shells are painted around the yolks with various multicolored bands going around the circumference of the eggs, the second most outer shell a lavender border with iridescent glitter on top to serve as the jelly membrane. Finally, the outermost shell, a black and white checkered

pattern, allows for an abrupt visual break between eggs, star grid, and background rainbow fragments as it illustrates the hardest part of the egg.



Master Incubator (2024)

The development and completion of “Master Incubator” taught me how to cherish the process of making instead of painting, as each of these eggs on the canvas had its uniqueness, individuality, and needs to achieve their fulfillment. I think of this piece as a material study beyond the paintbrush because the application of various materials was a vastly different, more time-consuming, more bodily taxing sensation than my other works, and for that, I am grateful! This was a time in my practice when I was forced to exercise patience. Like mother hens laying their eggs, I had to relinquish control where I did not have any and truly trust the process until this piece was ready to hatch into the world.

In addition to the egg’s ability to grow to fruition, there are also instances where it can be easily fractured by forces outside its control. I think that we humans are not different at all from

eggs. The cracking under pressure is something I, and everyone, understand all too well, especially as I am my hardest critic. I explore this type of pressure in the latest and final piece I completed for my MFA thesis titled “The Sky is Falling!!” In this particular piece, I hark back to my earlier figurative works from my first two quarters at UW. Reimagining and reintroducing the figure at this stage in my practice allowed me to integrate all that I have learned regarding color story, composition, narrative, rhythm, intention, and emotion—all rolled into a giant cartoon. “The Sky is Falling” illustrates trying to maintain oneself. At the same time, it feels like you’re balancing the weight of the world on your shoulders, which is a hyperbolic way to describe the general anxiety and inner turmoil about how many tasks we load onto our plate. I believe in moments where we feel like the sky is falling, shifting perspective to transform how we adapt and perceive the later outcome is essential. Maybe this big girl trapped in a milk crate is trying to open the sky and let it splat on top of her, opening a new world of vision rather than trying to patch the hole up because she’s nervous about the inevitable mess it’ll make.



The Sky is Falling!! (2024)

Eggs are sensitive like humans and can turn into a pile of goop and shards of itself if things become too much—the critical difference is that we humans can put ourselves back together again, unlike our egg counterparts. All this to say, the range of emotions and experiences I observe that can happen within the egg, I also see within ourselves and how complicated we have made things when, in reality, we echo the life of and makeup of an egg when we find a way to simplify.

Conclusion

During my time at the University of Washington, I am thrilled to have had an enriching, collaborative, and ever-expanding environment to grow artistically. In my first year, I learned to take big swings, working larger than ever by mapping simple and relatable concepts on a bigger scale entwined with the impact of vibrant colors. Once I broke out of my comfort zone by working large, next came establishing a foundation of narrative, intention, and purpose to guide the work. In my second year, I made it a goal to connect with the world beyond my art studio and, more importantly, beyond myself, to reach a wider audience. I discovered my preferred mode of connection is through bright color and humor with a cartoony style, which I hope will allow people to take things less seriously and enjoy the fun of what's in front of them. A phrase I have been repeating to myself throughout obtaining my MFA degree is “silly yet sincere” because as easy as it is to blast peoples’ retinas with color, sparkle, and chicken jokes, it's just as easy to use that as a mechanism to detract from my vulnerability in the work. The most valuable thing I've learned is that vulnerability is not a weakness, and the sincerity of the energy spent on these works to share it with the world only makes the art stronger and more open; I just had to

find my own way to do it. Overall, this experience of intimately immersing myself in painting and working alongside my cohort and faculty (with work and social life on top of it all) has given me so many rewarding and thought-provoking experiences that I will carry with me in everything I do going forward. I feel excited to take on the art world post-graduation in an even bigger and brighter way. The University of Washington has nurtured me to the point where I am unafraid to leave the nest and take flight at full speed.



Dawn of a New Egg (2024)