

# **The Painted Story of The Meat People**

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I dedicate this to my loved ones: Orestes Appel, Gina Pavone, Arianna Appel and Michela Biffert.

## Abstract

This thesis documents focuses on painting and mythology and how they investigate thematic questions regarding consciousness and existence. The study investigates how world building and the creation of fictional characters through the medium of paint can explore thoughts on mortality and impermanence. This paper examines painting's materiality and process, while reflecting on contemporary painting as well as art history and its precedents. This dissertations goal is to explore the authors relationship with mortality, impermanence and what it means to live and have a human experience.

## Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.....	5
Acknowledgment .....	6
Introduction.....	7
Process + Content .....	8
The Meat People + Supporting Characters .....	13
Figuration / Abstract / Representation .....	20
Mythology.....	25
Conclusion .....	29
Works Cited .....	31
Bibliography .....	33

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Jan Appel, Untitled 1, 2019, wood, acrylic paint, oil paint, canvas, photo and staples, 5' x 5'.

Figure 2: Jan Appel, *Meat & Petals*, 2019, acrylic paint, oil paint, wood, staples, 4' x 4'.

Figure 3: Jan Appel, *3 Panel Narrative*, 2019, canvas, wood, acrylic paint, oil paint, peg board, staples, 12' x 5'.

Figure 4: Jan Appel, *Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me*, 2019, oil paint, wood, canvas, photo, 4' x 4'.

Figure 5: Philip Guston, *The Studio*, 1969.

Figure 6: Jan Appel, *The Clash of the Meat People*, 2019, canvas, oil paint, wood.

Figure 7: Philip Guston, *The Line*, 1978.

Figure 8: Jan Appel, *Two Meat People*, 2019, oil paint, MDF, canvas, staples.

Figure 9: Rokni Haerizadeh, *My Heart Is Not Here, My Heart's in The Highlands*, Chasing The Deers, 2013.

Figure 10: Rose Wylie, *Pink Skater (Will I Win, Will I Win)*, 2015.

Figure 11: Karel Appel. *People, Birds and Sun*. 1964.

## Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, specifically that of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil Waututh Nations. As a settler, I believe this acknowledgement to be an important first step of many in a journey to better understanding and respecting the sovereignty of this land on which I live, study and make.

## Introduction

This thesis document deals with concepts and ideas surrounding painting and mythology. Art and storytelling have always been an interest of mine, long before I knew to stop and reflect as to why they were so captivating to me. Storytelling through different mediums such as film, literature, music or spoken word; often retellings of myths performed by my father at the dinner table were ways I could constantly depend on to get lost in thought, live and embody the narratives for a while. The visual image was another avenue for daydreaming and imagination. Flipping through my mother's art books was a source for intrigue and inquisitiveness. Looking at Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* can be a similar experience as looking through a *Where is Waldo* book.

In retrospect, an exercise I have always done is a type of 'world building'. I would do this as a passive practice in my head while daydreaming and drawing. The term world building is often used when describing fantastical universes and fictional realms in which characters inhabit and a story takes place in. A well-known example which I became increasingly fascinated with was J.R.R Tolkien's Middle-earth. Here stories like *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* reside and come to life. These narratives have remained long lasting inspirations for me.

Painting always seemed like an activity I would relish, yet I was exceptionally intimidated by the steps, action and process of doing it. Fortunately, at a point of desperation I got over the daunting task of picking up a brush and began to create marks on a canvas. Through the process of playing with colour, depth, shape, texture and figures I discovered a new world in which I could completely get lost in. I truly found painting and began to take it more seriously at a time when I felt lost and my future was a source of anxiety; I was working a job I felt no true passion for and thus, turned to painting as a form of release. The paintings I made at this point were cathartic, the paintings were colourful, fast, expressionistic and experimental. This way of working has remained a core element of my painting practice.

## Process + Content

The paintings I make are made from oil paint, acrylic paint, oil stick marks, found wood, store bought wood, stretched canvas, cut up canvas, pegboards, printed photographs and photo transfers, and staples. Through the addition of three-dimensional objects, they gain a sculptural element so that they occupy a liminal space between two- and three-dimensional existences. The canvas portions often include figurative characters which I refer to as “The Meat People”, or in some cases simply cut out brushstrokes implemented as collaged elements. The style of the paintings is defined by a frenetic application of paint that mimic emotional states of being.

What I want to do is study consciousness through this work. The Meat People explore thoughts on mortality and impermanence. My process, material exploration and expression through the physicality of the brushstrokes are reflections of my feelings whilst painting them. Inspired by mythologies, through my paintings, I want to understand our place in the world, and comprehend our existence and experiences.



Figure 1. Jan Appel, *Untitled 1*, 2019, Wood, acrylic paint, oil paint, canvas, photo and staples, 5' x 5'.

In order to achieve this, I utilize two main strategies. The first is the way in which the materials are being used and applied. In the example *Untitled 1* (Figure 1), there is a fast and frenzied style in which the paint is smeared on the surface. Often, a repetitive motion is applied to the canvas, each brushstroke differentiating from one another by their colour, texture and the tool with which the mark making was done – this may vary between different types of brushes and oil sticks, at times even using a more direct tool like my finger. I combine the application of acrylic paint and oil paint on the same surfaces. Due to the different chemical compositions of the paints, as well as its varied densities and drying times, the paints mix in a unique and unconventional manner. Another important aspect of the material process is the manner in which the support is being treated, manipulated and displayed. Canvases are ripped, cut apart and then stapled on the chosen surface. The canvases are installed on the wall in an archaic, practical non-precious manner. The paintings themselves are held up to the wall by screws holding the weight

at the bottom and placed at an angle at the top to stop them from falling over. This is a further technique to show the inner workings and process of how the painting was created, while still remaining true to the frenetic style in which the rest of the painting was produced.

The second strategy I use is the way in which the content of the paintings is generated through the figures and their mythology or narrative. Who is being represented? Why are they being represented in this manner? And why are they interacting within the painting in such a way? The figures I depict are in some ways always connected or tangled with my body and experience in this world. These figures are both an alter ego, and also something bigger than me. I address this in detail later in the thesis under the subheading “The Meat People.”

The cannibalization of materials and concepts are key aspects to my studio practice. The Cambridge Dictionary has two separate definitions for the concept of cannibalism that are of interest. The first definition is “the practice of a person who eats human flesh, or the behaviors of an animal that eats others of its own type.” And the second definition is “to take parts from a machine or vehicle in order to make or repair another machine or vehicle.” (“cannibalism”) Through the continuous reapplication of materials in my work one could see how these definitions of cannibalism would be applicable to my process. Occasionally, but not always, these materials had already existed in a previous painting that had been sitting in my studio; in a way this becomes a studio practice process of destroying old painting. This method allows for the reuse of old paintings to be given new life. In other scenarios, the paintings are clearly premeditated to be painted and then cut apart before being stapled on a new surface. I understand this as a way of showing the guts and process of making a painting. There is no illusion of how the canvases were torn or cut and simply applied to a new surface through stapling. This way of working feels honest, direct and immediate. It’s a form of exposing the process and the materials. It also refers to collage and the near never-ending possibilities of composition. I prefer to use the word cannibalism to describe this process instead of reuse or recycle, this is due to the fleshy and bodily experience associated with the term. The method combines different materials and collages them on a surface in a rough and loose style, as a way to metaphorize and reflect the mindset of tension, conflict and apprehension I have while producing the paintings. This process is taken a step further when I paint brush strokes on canvas, let them dry and then cut them out

and staple them to a separate wooden surface. It becomes a way of taking apart and deconstructing painting production.

The concept of cannibalization becomes of broaden interest to me when taking into consideration the main characters that are depicted in the paintings. These characters - The Meat People - are treated the same as the brushstrokes mentioned above. At times they are removed from a painting and stapled to a new work, in other scenarios they are painted directly on the final surface. The irony of cannibalizing Meat People is not lost on me. I connect this back to mortality and storytelling. Joseph Campbell writes about the bodily experience of myth;

“Heaven and hell are within us, and all the gods are within us. This is the great realization of the Upanishads of India in the ninth Century B.C. All the gods, all the heavens, all the world, are within us. They are magnified dreams, and dreams are manifestations in image form of the energies of the body in conflict with each other. That is what myth is. Myth is a manifestation in symbolic images, in metaphorical images, of the energies of the organs of the body in conflict with each other. This organ wants this, that organ wants that. The brain is one of the organs.” (Campbell 39)

Inside the world of the fantastical painted story, I like to think of The Meat People as being a product of an amalgamation of what our bodies are made from: brains, muscles, blood and veins. They carry with them all experiences. They are a symbol for the body through my lens; they are a metaphor for my understanding of existence. They are the dreams and manifestations through active imagination. My paintings and The Meat People will eventually rot and decay. Through the act of mixing acrylic and oil paint on unprimed canvas and wood, I am expediting the lifetime of the paintings.

The paintings I make have an element of conflict. They begin through the confrontation of materials and my body, they sustain through labour clashing with play, and conclude with an exchange between the viewer and the psyche. The figures act as a vessel for confrontation through their gazing and reflection between each other and the viewer.

Paintings have external and internal conflicts that drive the scheme of the work. In my paintings they are played out by brush strokes, colours, shapes, signifiers and an integration of supplementary materials which vary between cut up raw canvas or wood supports. As seen in *Meat & Petals* (Figure 2) I staple these materials together on the surface of the paintings, reminiscent of a surgical tool forcing two components together, while the paint watches as it smothers itself impatiently around and on top of objects. In my work, all these elements represent characters that often are in confrontation with one another, yet simultaneously, they merge together like an ensemble. This is a reflection of my mindset. By this I am suggesting that the feverish like qualities of these paintings are a representation of confusions, anxieties, cloudiness, guilt, satisfaction, insecurities and indulgence I feel in the contemporary world; specifically, with conversations of mortality, purpose and existential undertones.



Figure 2. Jan Appel, *Meat & Petals*, 2019, Acrylic paint, oil paint, wood, staples.

## The Meat People + Supporting Characters

The Meat People are a union of representation and abstraction. They are figures and yet their features are so vague and imprecise that their representation verges on a degree of abstraction. In this way they have become a device for bringing together my interests in representation and abstraction. The Meat People are from my imagination. They are the main characters to the painted story. They are painted quickly, loosely, and instinctually. Joseph Campbell writes regarding the hero in mythology in *The Power of Myth*;

“We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. And where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.” (Campbell 123).

Though I am not interested in the discourse of religion through my work, I am fascinated in finding refuge in the narrative. I am specifically intrigued by how this reflection can lead to an introspective endeavour. The narratives in which The Meat People reside in are often inspired by mythologies I have read. These are stories that people have created as tools to achieve understanding of our existence. I will not be referring to any specific myth or any individual group of people that created them. Instead, I am more interested in the concept of mythology as a whole.

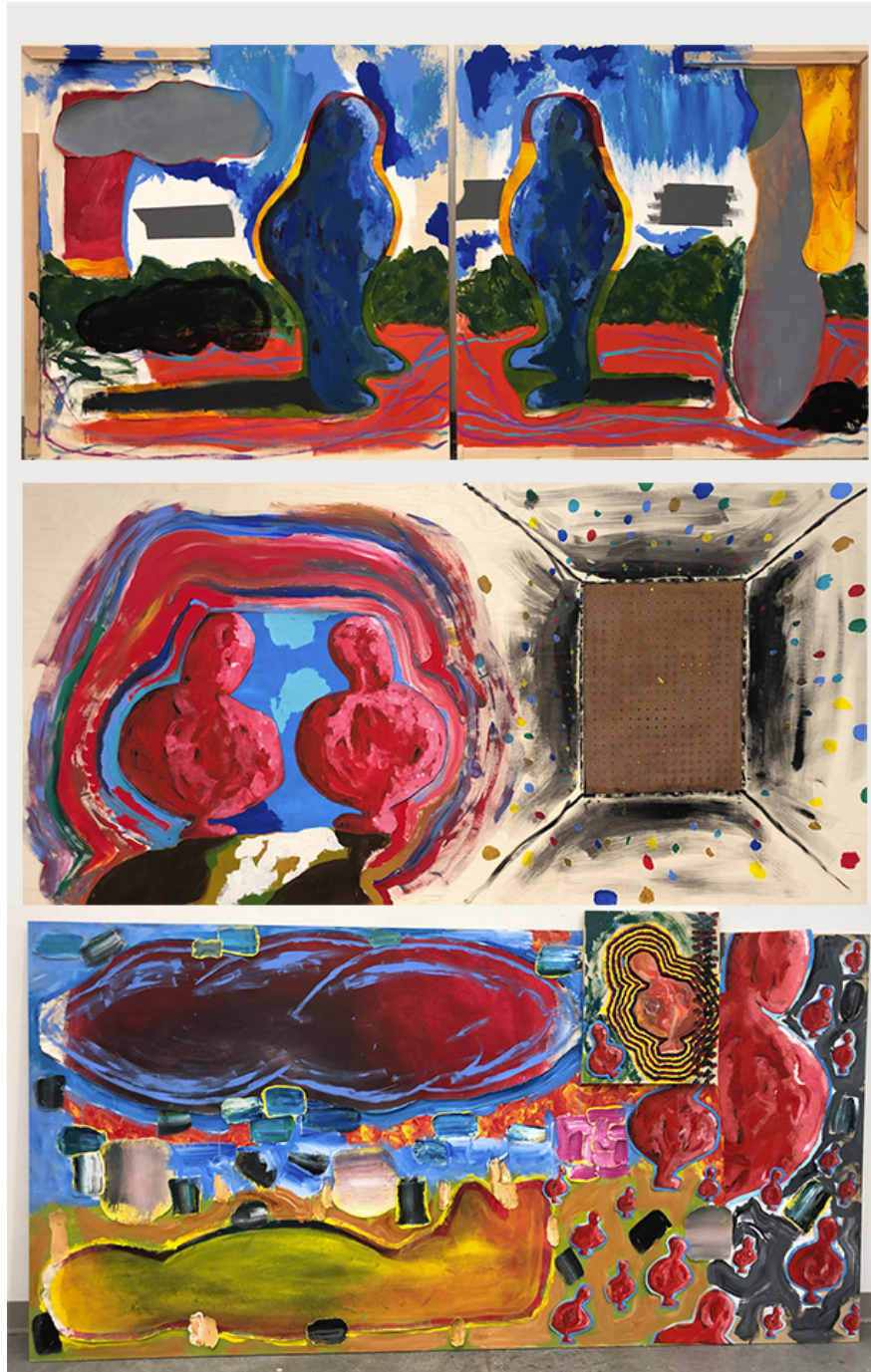


Figure 3. Jan Appel, *3 Panel Narrative*, 2019, Canvas, wood, acrylic paint, oil paint, peg board, staples, 12' x 5'.

The genesis of The Meat People as mythological characters began as I collaged them into the surfaces of *3 Panel Narrative* (Figure 3). The work is made up from three separate paintings

placed on top of one another on the wall. Each painting acts like a snapshot to a particular moment in the overall narrative of the painted story. The top panel represents the introduction through two figures meeting. The middle panel acts as a portal to the unknown. And the third is the chaos that is found there. During the process of making these paintings I was reading *The Immortals* by the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges. I will share two sentences found in the text, as I believe they summarize the story.

“There is nothing very remarkable about being immortal; with the exception of mankind, all creatures are immortal, for they know nothing of death.” And “No one is someone; a single immortal man is all men. Like Cornelius Agrippa, I am god, hero, philosopher, demon, and world -- which is a long-winded way of saying that *I am not*.” (Borges 105 – 118)

This sparked the interest in me to ask questions of The Meat People; would they be aware of their mortality? Are they suitable stand-ins for human characters? And ultimately, who or rather what really are these abstracted figures? I have yet to find answers to these questions though I do know that I want them to symbolize a human condition that is forever questioning the nature of existence. Perhaps, all they really are is a vessel for inquiry.

During a process of experimentation with the characters, I began to ask the question of why they do not possess any identity. As a way of completely opposing what I had been doing but also as a form of self-mimicry, I made a work in which all The Meat People were stapled with printed photographs of my face. As seen in *Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me*, (See Figure 4) there are eleven characters ambiguously standing staring at the viewer. The photos are printed and cut in a non-precise hurried manner. During this time, I had been contemplating what the purpose of making all this work really was. I saw it a way for me to understand the world. I began to feel self-conscious. I began to feel selfish. As a result, and a way of exposing these feelings, I stapled my face on all The Meat People characters. In an act that I believed would lead to further comprehension of the characters, it actually further complicated my knowledge of them. While dealing and thinking through this, I look at painter

Philip Guston. Author Robert Zaller takes an in-depth look at Guston's work in which the following quote focuses on the specific painting called *The Studio*:

“In Guston, we are thrown back again on the riddle of the ego as our primary experience of the world, and the drive into the world as the quest for the immanent, ungraspable self. What is hidden behind the mask, Guston suggests, is the face not only of the subject but of the object, the Medusa of things as they are. It was the realization of this paradox that enabled Guston to discard the mask and paint what so unexpectedly lay beneath: a face that was not the unique locus of subjectivity in a world of objects but an object itself, more specifically the frontal edge of an object called the head. Unmasked, the hidden head reveals everything and nothing, the mystery of a total banality, a peeled surface that is nothing more than a raw exposure, unhealed wound. There is nothing more to seek: what lies beneath can only be a deeper wound.” (Zaller 88-89).

The parallels I am interested in pointing out are the elements of the ego and of the self-portraiture. The understanding of the world is through the ego, yet the banality of it is being represented in the painting. In most of my compositions, the characters, which I see as extensions of my ungraspable self are often performing banal tasks, or in some cases – far less so by just gazing at one other or at the viewer. I take pleasure and find humour in the irony of calling these trite actions something as epic as mythologies.



Figure 4. Jan Appel, *Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me*, 2019, Oil paint, wood,  
canvas, photo, 4'x4'.

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Figure 5. Philip Guston, *The Studio*, 1969.



Figure 6. *The Clash of the Meat People*, 2019, Canvas, oil paint, wood.

*The Clash of the Meat People* (Figure 6) is a combination of paintings in dialogue with one another. The largest of the three paintings is a canvas placed on the centre of the far gallery wall, following the conventional historical rules of painting. The two other works are placed on the floor, being held up by materials that one would use in frame building. They sit at a 90-degree angle from the far wall from which the larger painting is hanging. The front and back sides of the free-standing works have been painted. The two floor paintings stare at each other while the larger one on the wall looks between them. The style in which I create the work is defined by a hectic application of paint that mimics my feeling of uneasiness. The viewer can walk around the floor paintings and notice how both the front and the back of the canvases have been treated as equal surfaces, at times the paint overtaking the wooden frame holding it upright. Both sides of the painting reveal their own interwoven story, by displaying the back, the viewer

is let in on a secret; something that wouldn't been seen if hung up on the wall. The floor paintings positioning mimics the wall painting's figures. Thus, the paintings themselves watch one another and ultimately create a relationship and dialogue between them.

Aside from the materiality and the way in which they are painted, the element that unifies the work is the repetition of The Meat People. Martijn Boven, author of *A Theater of Ideas: Performance and Performativity in Kierkegaard's Repetition* writes "Repetition is a category of performativity that aims to activate the subjectivity of the reader. This performativity affect is achieved by confronting the reader with an 'unresolved' existential problem that is not yet drawn into clarity but is staged in all its confusions and contradictions." (Boven 116). The repeated action of painting the figurative characters is a way of understanding and explaining my place in the world, and to comprehend my existence and experiences. The Meat People are the main characters in my work. They are archetypes and evocative signifiers. It is through them that figuration is possible. The Meat People are the protagonists in these painted scenarios performing and interacting with the other "characters" namely paint, staples, canvas and wood. Much like traditional mythology and folktales, the paintings are a way to address something much bigger than the figures themselves. In this way they are both extremely personal and universal.

I understand painting as a form of a deliverance, both in the way in which we read them, but also in the way I make them which is a deeply physical and emotional process. Making paintings allows me to be in the moment while simultaneously having an out-of-body experience. Artist and author Stephen Newton writes on this sensation:

"The unconscious spiritual dimension of painting can only be engaged through its own unique form. Surface figurative symbols only serve to describe what is happening in this deeper psychic dimension. Redemption is achieved here, in a struggle, carried out exclusively in formal terms between two opposing types of form. On the one hand there are obvious shapes and clear lines and colours, deliberately executed, which represent order and cohesion. On the other hand, there are the accidental marks and discolorations which can't be planned but can only be intuitively detected." (Newton).

Newton argues that painting is unique to its materiality through its combination of purposefulness and accidental moments. These flashes are born from a conflict through process that interchangeably becomes a reason for reaction through experimentation. The process of creating a painting is a bodily experience that I can best describe as a form of catharsis. Painting is the best way I know how to express myself. Often, I will make a painting with only a vague idea and ambiguous understanding of what I am truly after or how I am feeling. After the painting is created, it allows me to have a moment of self-reflection through the reading of my material manipulation and analysis of the symbols and metaphors that have been laid down on the surface.

## Figuration / Abstract / Representation

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Figure 7. Philip Guston, *The Line*, 1978

The relay between abstraction and representation have led me to ask the following questions; what roles do they play in image making in general? And why are both forms of painting important to me? Again, I look at Philip Guston. He moved away from abstract expressionism and into representation in the 60's due to his concerns of American society. Author Robert Zeller comments on the political climate of the United States that elicited Guston's work; "The Kennedy and King assassinations, the events surrounding the democratic

national convention in Chicago, and finally the election of Richard Nixon rekindled his political anger, and, like any pamphleteer, he reached for his materials nearest to hand.” (Zaller 85).

Guston famously said:

“When the 1960’s came along I was feeling split, schizophrenic. The war, what was happening in America, the brutality of the world. What kind of man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into a frustrated fury about everything – and then going into my studio to adjust a red to a blue” (Slifkin 220).

Guston’s perspective and motivation for reengaging with figuration suggest a certain degree of what I would describe as existential guilt. Or more prosaically, what is the point of painting when faced with the doomed reality of our world and existence? Writing this in 2020 I have my own feelings of existential guilt regarding and surrounding the world today. We live in a world where the brutality hasn’t seemed to change much throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. With such an incredible amount of hatred in the world that produces hopelessness, I would rather not shine light on any issue in specific, instead I’d like to focus on the big picture. Making these paintings is a tool to understand our existence by looking and reflecting on how past stories have led to other people understanding and coming to terms with the issues of their time. These stories have also led to attempts at understanding existential questions that have surrounded human beings since we became sentient.

The play between abstraction and representation is evident in the way I paint the backgrounds and landscapes in which the characters engage through. In many of my paintings, I depict the ground or grass along with the sky with simplified loose brush marks that allude to a broad landscape. This is a strategy to focus on the general over the specific. This approach also creates a world and scenario which is identifiable but also otherworldly; this is something I am always trying to balance. I enjoy and gravitate towards this way of paintings to achieve a type of world-building that is unique to painting done through the marriage between abstraction and representation. The ambiguous results of this way of painting leave open room for interpretations and possibilities. It doesn’t dictate specificities, rather it creates a fictional, fantastical world for the fictional and fantastical characters of The Meat People to engage and live within.



Figure 8. Jan Appel, *Two Meat People*, 2019, oil Paint, MDF, canvas, staples.

Media Farzin’s paper “Unpeopled” in the book *Chaos and Awe* speaks about Iranian painter Rokni Haerizadeh (see figure 9). The author summarizes the chapter on his work as;

“contemporary experiments in figuration, in particular – might have something more concrete to offer. Abstraction, deformation, the violence of sensation, movement, bodily presence, witnessing, humor, and play can bring intensity and passion into a cosmopolitan practice of painting – one that is defined by difference, not as a principle or a theory, but simple as part of the lived experience of its practitioners. Such images can

open up the ambiguous space and values of our present moment, conveying its conflict and chaos through sensation. That this will often involve tiny, faceless, nameless, and unheroic bodies – animals and hybrids and imagery that defies recognition – is precisely the point. This is the image of history painting unpeopled.” (Farzin 25).

Farzin’s description of the unpeopled is precisely how I view the characters in my paintings. They serve as an equivocal tool to experiment and move throughout the world today. It also allows for humour and play to be a driving force in the process of making. The characters I paint are buoyant, repetitive and playful through their unassuming bodies and shapes, this is a tool to counter and ironicize the deep psychological existential well from which they drawn and born from.

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Figure 9. Rokni Haerizadeh, *My Heart Is Not Here, My Heart’s in The Highlands*, Chasing The Deers, 2013.

In his article “Painting and Photography Meet Under Wallace's Hand” Kevin Griffin refers to Wallace “There is a dialectical conflict between abstract painting which has no specific representation value other than abstract painting itself and photography, which is loaded with all kinds of representational references” (Griffin). Though Wallace is writing about abstract painting and photography, I believe that similar notions are at play when considering the interplay

between abstract and representational painting. I am fascinated by the apparent conflict between these two forces of representation and abstraction. Weaving in and out of representation is freeing and can lead to unexpected scenarios, in which one must find a solution to merge the two approaches of image making together.

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Figure 10. Rose Wylie, *Pink Skater (Will I Win, Will I Win)*, 2015

Rose Wylie is figurative painter I am inspired by. Perhaps it is because her paintings appear free, honest, and impulsive. A humorous painting which showcases these ideas is *Pink Skater (Will I Win, Will I Win)*. (see figure 10). Roy Oxlade, Wylie's partner, writes about her work in his book *Art and Instinct*:

"In the context of Wylie's work, Bachelard's Naïve Consciousness is best understood as unaffectedness. At the same time, her characteristic denial of cliché rests firmly upon choices made from a position of discriminating awareness. This synthesis results in a paradoxical restatement of refinement, unexpectedly allowing directness, and the inartistic, to become the essential marks of a new subtlety." (Oxlade)

While our paintings are quite different, I think both our works are dealing with similar stylistic aspects of naïveté. I have struggled with the term naïveté while describing my work due to what I

understand as its varied and open definitions. It is often used as a way to describe innocence and unsophistication which to me is a rather shallow interpretation. I do however find the idea of unaffectedness as intriguing and exciting. Oxlade describes it in a way that it encompasses and amalgamates the purposeless and focused, as well as the honesty and evasiveness of the works. I believe the main aspects of this stylistic way of painting that appeal to me is its humour, playfulness and strangeness that is carried with every brushstroke.

Painter Karel Appel, alongside fellow artists Asger John, Christian Dotremont, Constant Nieuwenhuys and Corneille Guillaume Beverloo were part of an artistic movement established in 1948 called CoBrA. In an interview between Franz-W Kaiser and Michel Ragon, art historian Kaiser speaks about CoBrA and their inspirations of various artistic movements of the first half of the twentieth century:

“Klee and his interests in in Children’s drawings, Dubuffet’s Art Brut and his interest in non-official, non-academic art, and finally Surrealism, giving the unconscious the role of driver of creation. If I understand correctly, all these trends in the search for an almost Rousseauist innocence were summarized in a way by Cobra.” (Kaiser 20).

CoBrA was encapsulating these other artistic movements and creating their own unique twist. Their intentions and aims were to separate themselves from the art world. by utilizing the freedom found in children’s drawing and mixing it with the surrealist approach of subconscious automatic expressionistic way of painting. This crude, loose and impulsive way of painting is an approach to mark making that I am drawn to as well. Ultimately, this pure way of working is one which remains authentic and undisturbed, it is a vehicle for a search of authenticity.

## Mythology

Ultimately what I am trying to do is study consciousness through the act of building a mythology for The Meat People characters. Percy S Cohen, author of “Theories of Myth” describes what a myth is:

“The chief characteristic of myth are as follows: a myth is a narrative of events; the narrative has a sacred quality; the sacred communication is made by symbolic form; at least some of the events and objects which occur in the myth neither occur or exist in the world other than that of myth itself; and the narrative refers in dramatic form to origins or transformations.” (Cohen 337)

Through my paintings I want to build a world and a mythology for The Meat People. ‘Allegory’ is the term I have arrived at to describe the paintings as a whole, I choose this word because I believe it speaks to the paintings as an aggregate, a combination of arbitrary signs that create a narrative. David Works author of *Telling Stories* defines the term allegory; “The word allegory usually refers to a composition made of images or personifications that are all reducible to a conventional set of meanings. – All allegory’s enigmas are hardly conventional, and its meanings are elusive” (Works 55). Work uses the word ‘enigma’ when speaking about allegories. A synonym for this word is ‘paradoxical’ – a term I find intriguing and fitting when thinking of my work. Painting is a paradoxical activity, it plays with highlighting the picture plane on which the paint is applied on, and also contests the depth perception through the addition of multiple materials. The paintings are additionally paradoxical in their subject matter, the humorous figures contradict the seriousness of their origin. The allegories that are created through the composition of the signifiers come from many different wells of inspiration. The main source of my paintings come from my personal fears and anxieties, the comical relief of the paintings act as an absurdity to the manner I feel about the subjects I paint.

The Meat People act as the unconventional heroes to the painted mythology. Perhaps, a term better fitted to describe these characters would be antihero. The hero and antihero are archetypes that repeat themselves in mythology and in storytelling in general. Carl Jung’s Archetypes is a theory I believe work alongside these paintings. Jung understood archetypes as:

“The primordial image, or archetype, is a figure--be it a daemon, a human being, or a process--that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed. Essentially, therefore, it is a mythological figure. . . . In each of these images there is a little piece of human psychology and human fate, a remnant of the joys and sorrows that have been repeated countless times in our ancestral history.”  
(Jung)

In conjunction with Jung’s ideas, Joseph Henderson’s paper “Ancient Myths and Modern Man” refers to the hero symbol in myth. “As a general rule it can be said that the need for hero symbols arrive when the ego needs strengthening – when, that is to say, the conscious mind needs assistance in some task that it cannot accomplish unaided or without drawing on the source of strength that lied in the unconscious mind”. (Henderson 114). This has led me to ask a question: If The Meat People are the heroes, then who is the antagonist of the painted narrative? As Henderson mentions, perhaps the genesis of The Meat People was due to my ego needing a source of strength. Ironically, I can’t help but wonder if on top of me being the creator of the painted story, I am also acting as the antagonist. The Meat People embody the archetypal hero, through them I engage, question and come to terms with the overarching ideas of existence, our place in this world, and general human experiences.

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Figure 11. Karel Appel. *People, Birds and Sun*. 1964

There is a supernatural element to mythology that has always been of great magnetism to me. Similarly, painting has its own magical features that fascinate me. In the book *Karel Appel: Retrospective*, author Klaus Ottmann has an essay “The Appel Effect”, here Ottmann refers to the magical aspects of Karel Appel’s paintings in conjunction with the “magical function of speech”:

“Appel’s works are visual representation of the “magical function of speech”, to borrow Japanese linguist Toshihiko Izutsu’s phrase. In his analysis, Izutsu suggests that all language is essentially magical, “that our words and sentences, before being utilized by professional magicians and sorcerers for their erroneous or evil purposes, are in themselves ultimately of a magical nature.” Izutsu identifies three aspects of this linguistic magic: 1. The fundamental magic of meaning, that is, the notion of magic which is found embedded in the very semantic constitution of our words. 2. The practice of magic by means of linguistic sings... in the narrow, technical sense of the word, e.g. spells and incantations, blessings and curses, oaths, prayers, etc.; and as being between two. 3. The “spontaneous” magic intense desires or emotion, which may modify even the most colorless words and particles in a very peculiar way transform them in a moment into something charged with mysterious power.” (Ottmann 42-43).

Thinking of my paintings as visual representations of the “magical function of speech” is of great excitement. Painting has its own type of language similar to speech, in a way beyond its consciousness. I see my work in conversation with Karel Appel’s paintings, the magical elements of my paintings exist through painterly brushstrokes which are performed through colour and shape. The process and action of painting are other worldly. The materiality of the paint transforms as it dries and mixes with other pigments. Through an amalgamation on brushstrokes it represents and translates symbols. Paint can be applied thick, spread thin. You add paint, subtracts it and scratch it. One can try and control it, but at times it has a mind of its own; the paint animates itself, beyond language or science. It embodies immaterial concepts.

## Conclusion

Circling forward, I have come to the further realisation that the work surrounding the mythology of The Meat People through the experimentation of paint is just the beginning of something I want to foster further. Continuing to build a mythology and expanding the world building for these characters, is something I am drawn and inspired to pursue. There is an ironic comical relief around the juxtaposition of having exceedingly epic source material inspiring the paintings, while in contrast, creating a mythological narrative for these characters which are not engaged in anything grandiose or heroic while still calling it a mythology. The incorporation of further banal tasks performed by The Meat People and the additional integration of prosaic objects is something I want to add to future paintings. This play of irony and humour is important to me as it is a driving force of the creative and physical action of painting. It is also a revelation of the ego which is ultimately making the paintings and revealing itself within and behind each layer of irony and paradox.

A logical next move would be to start writing stories and narratives that would then coexist and directly affect the paintings. The history of these two creative outputs have a long history of influencing one another. Two popular examples are manifestos which contain public declarations of intentions, motivations and opinions, and a thesis paper which is an academic research-based document that supports the artwork. The type of writing I believe that would be most suitable to push the work further is one rooted in narrative and lore. New visual inspirations are miniature paintings and illuminated manuscripts. Author Susan H. Hutchinson describes what these illuminated manuscripts are:

“They are books or other text embellished with ornamental letters, scrolls and other designs in color or gold, or in rare instances silver, but always done by hand. True illumination combines the use of bright colors and precious metals and literally illuminates or makes bright the page. Sometimes tiny paintings were used to enhance the

beauty of the whole or part of one side of a leaf and these are called ‘miniatures.’”  
(Hutchinson 73).

These hand painted books are a fascinating way of combining writing with paintings directly on the same surface. The narratives and metaphors begin to coexist through subject, language and materiality. These miniatures can also cohabit with the larger scale paintings, in a way becoming a supporting document as well as a direct influence on what the biggest paintings will convert to in the future.

Painting is a medium which holds and extraordinary weight of history and traditions. Contemporary faux naïf is a term that is used to group artist working in a similar style which incorporate childlike and primitive ways of painting and drawing. Artists such as Henri Rousseau and Paul Klee are often looked at and referred to as big names in historical naïve painting. These sorts of artists have inspired contemporary painters working from a similar vein, such as Tal R and Jules de Balincourt. With my sight on future works and direction, I look at artists such as Tal R as inspiring and influential in taking a faux naïf approach to painting and push it even further. Gemma Tipton, writer and editor of Context magazine wrote on Tal R’s work:

“Tal R’s bright and playful images have their roots in CoBrA and the ‘primitive’ forms of childish and Outsider art. Luring us in by the colours and shapes, Tal R’s paintings harbour darker presences, their diverse narratives undermined by the recurrence of the basic structure underpinning them all.” (Tipton 82).

In my paintings I often use humour, colour and material playfulness as ironic elements to complicate and mask the darker themes the paintings are dealing with. Using this way of working influenced and informed by historical artistic movements such as CoBrA and contemporary artists like Tal R, I want to further complicate and push the capabilities of this style and approach to painting.

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