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Secrets

Todd McCaffrey

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Claremont Graduate University
East Gallery
251 East 10th St
Claremont, CA 91711

Secrets

Todd McCaffrey
MFA Thesis Exhibition
April 23-27, 2018

Opening Reception Tuesday, April 24, 2018
Gallery Hours M-F 10am-5pm

https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_mfatheses/172

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Todd McCaffrey

Written Statement

For over thirty years I've been an author of science-fiction and fantasy. I was drawn to science-fiction from an early age: I loved the notion of exploring new planets, going new places, and learning new things. To pursue this goal, I became a Mechanical Engineer and, later, started writing full-time to explore the futures that might unfold before us.

I entered art with the same passion of exploration and interest. I realized that both my art and my writing are merely aspects of creativity. Creativity is based on asking questions and so is inherently iconoclastic and revolutionary: those questions challenge the order of things; creativity thrives on change which is anathema to the established order.

I've explored abstract art, as well as science-fictional art, and, most recently, figurative art. I like abstract art because it allows me to explore the relationships of texture, color, and line in the production of a compelling piece. I like science-fictional art because it reflects my writing interests. I think as a species we strive ever upward and my fantastical planets are an expression of that yearning for more, for exploration. What I could not figure out was why I liked figurative art.

And then I realized: all three are explorations of the nature of the human being -
- the very essence of what makes us human. What I am searching for in all three is
an understanding not just what it means to be human but how we, as humans,
interact -- and could interact -- with each other.

The faces and figures I create are not representational of the surface and
materials that I choose. They are my attempts to understand the alien that is at the
core of every person around me.

When I create faces from references, I expand upon what is visible by the
addition of the emotions I bring into my creative process.

When I create faces solely from my own imagination, I create the interior as
well as the exterior of the character I am painting.

My question is not just: what does it mean to be human? But also: what makes
you human? How do I see you? What do you represent?

Just like a space probe sent to explore far distant worlds -- like those of my
paintings -- I am here on Earth exploring distant faces. I am looking at the alien fire
that I see in every face. Not just real faces -- indeed, most often *not* real faces -- but
the faces of my interpretation, the faces I see through the alien probe that is my eyes.
I am exploring faces through paintings the way we explore the planets with space
probes.

I am looking at the otherness of the world around me. The '60s group, *the Doors*, said it well in their song, *People Are Strange*. I treat my subjects as "other", seeing more than the mere visage but the colors and stresses behind the facades I find before me.

My "people" -- the faces -- often start from nowhere: from the center of my imagination. Sometimes I work from a photo or life but the results are always more than what I see. That "nowhere" is my internal dialog about the nature of humanity and that is what I'm ultimately trying to portray. All my paintings show people trying to see *us* just as much as we try to see *them*.

Because I'm trying to capture something so ephemeral -- not just the essence of a person but even the essence of humanity -- I rarely achieve my direct goal. This failure provides a greater insight: not *perfectly* capturing a likeness allows me to explore more of the *inner* likeness of a person.

I fall short of "realism"... and create something that is supra-realistic. That is, I strive not only to create images that combine what could be acquired with a realistic image but also to add a layer of emotion -- a depth beyond the vision of mere skin. This combination is inherently impossible, so I have come to accept the "failure" of creating realistic images and have embraced the notion of creating these supra-realistic images.

I have explored the use of many different media and materials: canvas, wood panel, watercolor paper, wrapping paper, and Yupo paper as well as acrylics, oil sticks, oil pastels, soft pastels, and chalk. I find that I am most successful when I'm least concerned with my results and least successful when I try to "control" the outcome.

While I still love acrylics, my current favorite media is probably oil pastels. I use oil sticks but have a love-hate relationship with them. I generally use acrylics for backgrounds and general body but find myself using oil pastels for atmosphere and intensity. Put another way, I may start with acrylics or oil sticks but I often end with oil pastels. When working with oil pastels or oil sticks, I prefer to use my hands because I get a more intimate feel of the material and media. You might say that I prefer a "hands-on" approach.

In terms of material size, I have no distinct preference. I enjoy a large canvas for the opportunity it offers but I also enjoy the challenge (and, sometimes, frustration) of working smaller sizes. I've done a lot of work in 9"x12" and 11"x14" formats. Because of the smaller size involved, I must accept a lower resolution of details which adds a certain diffusion to the works.

With regards to color, I tend to prefer a vivid palette with plenty of bright colors but I work to avoid needlessly over-saturating my material; often operating under the "less is more" precept.

Because I'm trying to depict the human face, I am interested in how little of the face is required to produce recognition and, even, to create emotion. Recently, I've found myself starting with eyebrows and building up faces from them -- perhaps because eyebrows are the seat of expression?

In looking in the world of art history for similar works or precedence, I find a resonance with the early 20th century modernist movement with such works as Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* which was derided as primitive, naïve and "a failure." As well as the works of Jean Fautrier and Jean Dubuffet whose works were often considered scabby and ill-drawn.

I suppose that if I were to take on a label, I'd call myself a "supra-modernist." Not post-modernistic because I continue the modernist tradition of simple lines while adding more blending of color and more detail, arriving at something beyond modernist but before realism. I am pleased with my art, pleased with this way of exploring the insides of humanity.

Secrets

First is the Candle. I drew it because candles provide light and warmth, protection from the night, fear, and cold. Candles are at the bedrock of civilization.

To the left is Ghost, the figure in the white hat. Its presence is haunting: one can't tell if it is old or young, man or woman, happy or sad. I can tell you that it wants to be near the Candle.

To the right of the Candle is the Specter. The Specter's hat came first. It seems as if figure is both looking over its shoulder and straight at us.

Beyond it is Witness. It's not clear if this person is alive or dead, prone or upright, woman or man, frozen or ready to move.

To the right of Witness is the Captain. The Captain is looking at tomorrow.

These figures come from my imagination: built up from oil pastels over acrylic backgrounds.

Right of the Captain is the Spy — with one eye open and the other hidden, concealing secrets. This piece was drawn from a reference photo of one of my friends.

Next is Surrender. I placed it furthest from the Candle: if the Candle is civilization, Surrender is at the borders of solitude and madness.

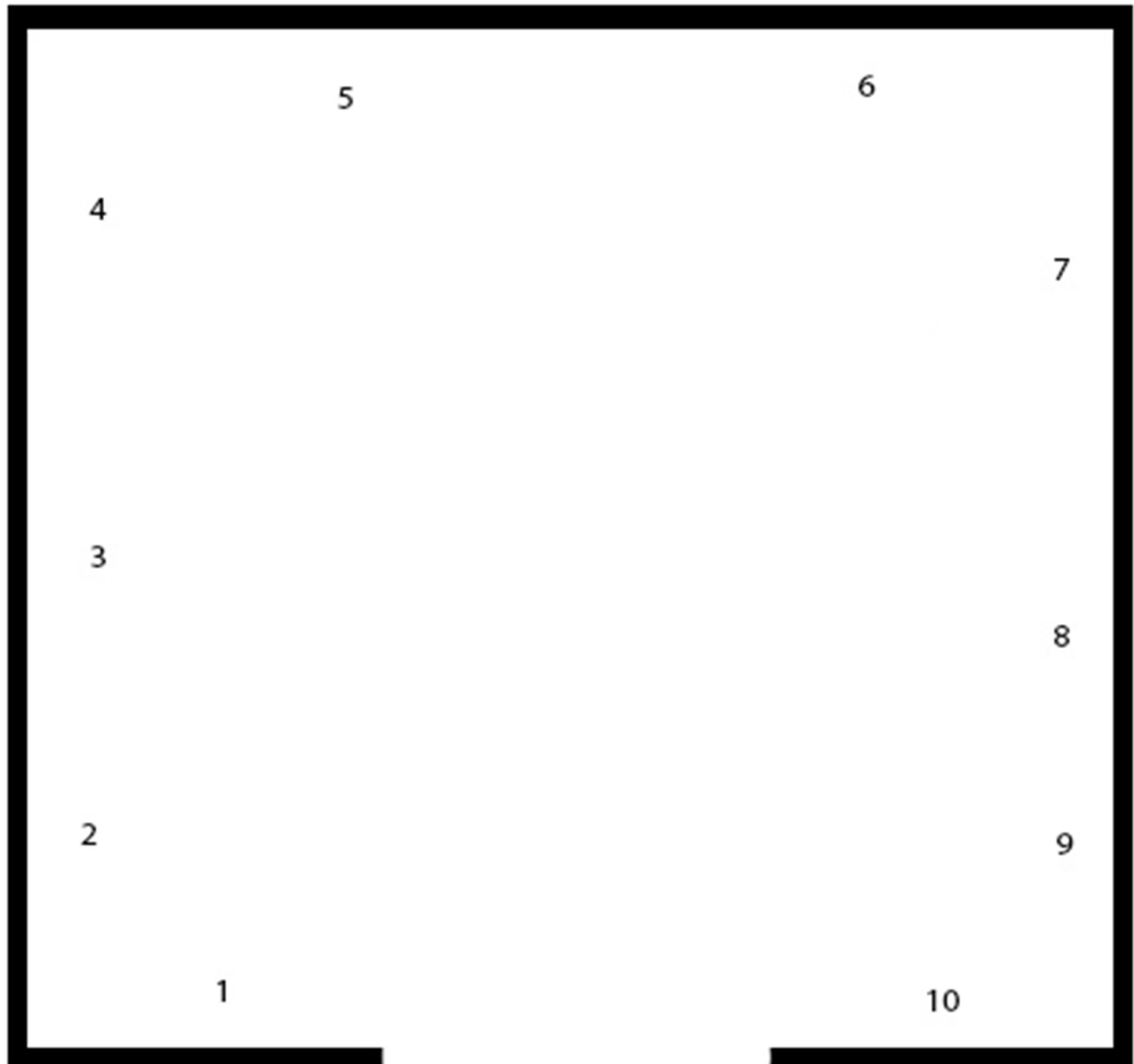
On the other side of the door is Serenity. This is based on another photo reference. It makes me smile.

Next to it on the other wall is the piece I call Burning Man. I started, oddly enough, with a photo reference from the movie *Indiana Jones*.

Finally, next to Ghost we have Hope. I started with an abstract acrylic but found the face demanding its place in the forefront.

Secrets

Todd McCaffrey



1. Serenity
2. Burning man
3. Princess
4. Ghost
5. Candle

6. Spectre
7. Witness
8. Captain
9. Spy
10. Surrender







