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by

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Artist and Muse

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Artist and Muse

by

Wyatt Snead Ramsey

Report

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The University of Texas at Austin

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Abstract

Artist and Muse

Wyatt Snead Ramsey, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2019

Supervisor: Dan Sutherland

Abstract: On October, 2018 Drue Henegar, BA Art History, and I began an collaboration to explore the parallels between the artist-muse and artist-critic relationships. The following is a documentation of our correspondence and work leading up to the University of Texas Master of Arts Thesis Exhibition at the Visual Arts Center in Austin Texas.

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Introduction



Figure 1. Instagram Screen Shot

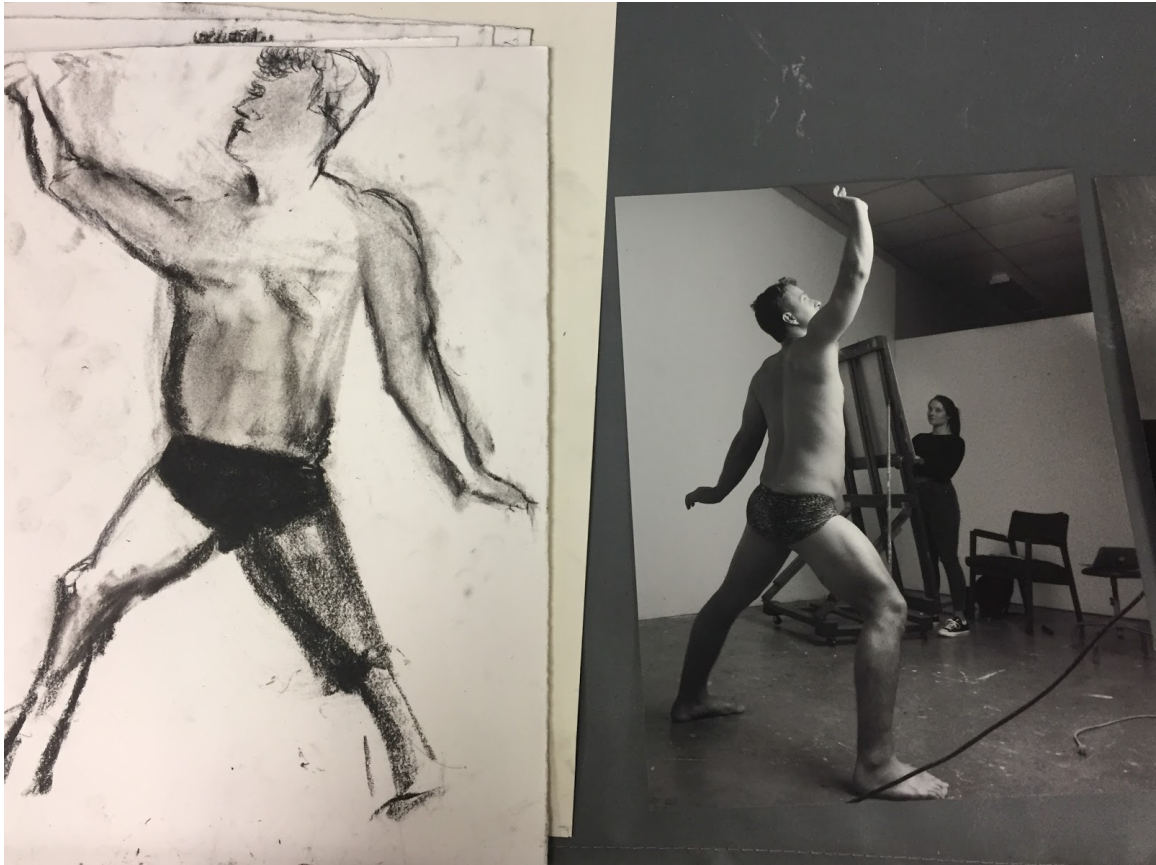


Figure 2. The collaboration

Letter 1

Dear Drue,

After our conversation on artistic agency I've decided I'd write to you a more detailed rant.

Based on your studies I assume you know the history of artists who use beautiful women as their metaphorical muse. These women were not represented as subjects with their own humanity but as stand-ins for the creative impulse itself. In the days of metaphorical painting, the likeness of a subject was not nearly as important as the ideals they represent. In fact many figurative paintings never even looked like the idealized subjects they worked from.

Today, depicting the female form as a metaphor for artistic inspiration is largely dead. Art critics commonly speak of the "male gaze", art made by men for men of an idealized woman. The phrase is often used to demonstrate how women are flattened into one dimensional objects of lust and not presented as subjects with all of their humanity intact. Personally, I find this critique trite.

Paintings are art objects to be felt, not people to be respected. They are wet expressions fondled with the brush. Have you ever noticed that critics never talk about the objectification of sensuous clouds? Why are they not concerned over a decadent flower's ontological roundness? The complaint raised against objectification in art is predicated on a view steeped in social constructivism, the belief that human culture imitates art. If only we artist yielded that much influence. We don't.

With regard to social praxis, we artists are inept. Art has little power to right the wrongs of social injustice. The nature/nurture debate of mass media is too long to get into for

now, suffice it to say that the influence of the fine arts is infinitesimally smaller than that of the entertainment and advertising industries. This is largely due to the illegibility of art to a world illiterate of its historical and theoretical underpinnings. Most people don't have the time or inclination to understand art, much less be moved by it.

I understand that my denial of art-as-activism could be seen as bleak. But please don't despair, I offer not a worse outlook but one different from that of the current zeitgeist.

Art has power. But that power is more descriptive than prescriptive. The power of art lies in its latent potential to enrich human experience. I suppose this makes me an adherent to the old self-expressionist camp of art. Art that doesn't tell me how to live, but shows me what it is to live. This art has room to respect differences of opinion even when they seem morally incomprehensible. I may not like or agree with a lot of what I see in the gallery but I respect its right to be there.

Back to the objectification of people. Perhaps this phrase is a misnomer. Somehow thinking that one is able to give a complete picture of humanity in all its fullness within a single work of art is a foolish errand. The view that art merely illustrates an idea is a philistine view. It is not a very expansive understanding of an embodied experience. How something is created cannot be separated from what is depicted.

I recently went to an exhibition of French Revolution paintings. The exhibition featured a few works by Jacques-Louis David, who was hired by the empire to do many propaganda pieces for Napoleon. The paintings were marvelously humanizing. However, not because they motivated me to join the ranks of Napoleon but because they transcended the political climate of their day. The paintings were handled with such elegant simplicity and care for the subject that I lost interest in who was portrayed in the court paintings. For me they were about empathy through the handling of the paint. All that is to say, I believe the fashionable trappings of the present will be whittled away by the knife of

time. How we speak of experience will always speak louder than what experience is depicted.

Today bandwagons go by the alias “the conversation” or “contemporary discourse”. Most often this discourse entails a scared public looking for comfort in the confident yet misguided vocal minority. Good-willed people get swept into the frenzy of misinformed certitude. Much of my work is a response towards the increasing inability to see outside the lens of tribal affiliation. Often these affiliations are shrouded in ideological maxims about changing the world. In the arts the mechanism of this change is often viewed as trickle-down empathy. Somehow projections of a moral progress embodied in material objects will manifest the psyche of popular culture and the world will become a more harmonious place. The intention seems noble. But as the cliché goes “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

The irony is that many left-leaning communities found within the arts are remarkably similar to the religious right-leaning communities of antiquity. In the divine pursuit of a utopia, those who deviate from the theologies of equity are branded as heretics and excommunicated. This tribalism splinters the pursuit of cohesion through the self-differentiation of ever narrowing identities. Instead of bringing people together to meditate on their shared humanity ideological zeal promotes disintegration.

I call this groupthink, “the progressive gaze”, art made by progressives for progressives that flattens the human experience into a leftist grandstanding competition. The result is the oversimplification of real world problems into soundbites of underwrought virtue signaling. This gaze flattens out serious accounts of injustice with verbal lip service to cosmic justice. The self-anointed prophets of divine retribution then begin to deal out causes and punishments for the grand societal evils.

The ancients' and progressives' belief in grand sweeping narratives of evil intentions inspires an equal amount of witch hunts prescribing devious motives to those misfortunate enough to be possessed by wrong ideology. Individual dissenters with unique motives are replaced by cardboard good guys and bad guys. You are either with us or against us in our mission to make all things fair.

Part of my resistance to the cultural undertow of many social justice movements is that I don't believe sustainable morality can be regulated from the top down or peer pressured into a healthy form of existence. Doing the right thing must come from individual intention. As I have learned from my religious upbringing, any attempt to pressure or enforce codes of morality are met with a backlash of resentment. People need the ability to choose for themselves what they do or do not wish to support.

Furthermore, the insistence on self-differentiation through left-wing identity politics has led to an equally disturbing reaction of right-wing identity politics. We must assume that the tactics used on one tribe will have an equal and opposite reaction on the other. Do we really think we can shame people from public existence without the same tactic launched against us?

It amazes me that our collective memory is so small. Thirty years ago that we were fighting the culture wars against Reagan's cabinet for our right to free artistic expression. Now it appears that conservatives have taken the reigns of free speech and been labelled morally deplorable by the artists. We see dissension as hate speech and call for it to be deplatformed. And at what cost? Who defines hate? Who are the gatekeepers of morality? Is the current precedent for short-term gains worth the long-term consequences?

Personally, I am not willing to give up the liberties of artistic expression for even the best of causes regardless of its origin. I am weary of partisan causes. It is a game of consensus

herding which requires very little introspective reflection or inward facing doubt. It is an attitude of answers leading the questions and not of questions for their own sake.

I enjoy art that begins and ends with questions. I prefer to play the heretic or the contrarian. They are catalyzing. Heretics hone thinking, or at the very least least challenge groupthink. They question the orthodoxies of their own tribe at the expense of their own alienation, not for the sake of martyrdom but because they can't bare to be herded. Being a contrarian means bringing the scalpel to itself, deconstructing deconstruction. Being a contrarian is not about what you think but about how you think. It is standing up for free thought and expression, even when the results are a short term loss.

Today many people want to get buddy-buddy with their viewer. I prefer an antagonistic seduction. I want to challenge the viewer out the complacency of preset paradigms. Even those paradigms that belong to our tribe. Often I ask myself, "What does it mean to be a on the left while critiquing the left?" Perhaps in my case familiarity has bred contempt.

There is nothing subversive about subversive art. I'm talking about art that self proclaims itself to be "challenging", "undermining", "critiquing", "exposing", "examining", or "probing" the forces of capitalism, colonialism, sexism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, or your run of the mill oppression. The theoretical writings that coincide with the work only serve to pander to the anointed who hold the keys to heavenly residencies. Regurgitating the anointed's theology exonerates them from collective guilt. By partnering with the imagined forces of good they can imagine they can compensate for their guilt-ridden conscience. (As a side note, if you really want to know whether or not someone cares about these virtuous causes, weigh the cost of their sacrifice against the benefits to their career. Isn't it funny how altruism usually coincides with career opportunism?)

My work is about positioning well-placed contrarian jokes with the most sincere conviction. It is a kind of playful tinkering with the mechanisms of fickle ideology that takes itself too seriously. Not a particular ideology but ideology itself. I am exploiting the contexts that others find meaningful but I find trite and empty. My failures is meant to disarm by giving the audience a temporary sensation of superiority and perhaps remind them what they have been fighting for all along. Plus it's just fun to play the transgressor.

That said, playing a role of bad guy admits that there really is a continuum between bad and good. The ugly reality of people hurting each other is painful, disdainful, and dehumanizing. Playacting the bad acknowledges this reality in the background, but simultaneously challenges the notion that anyone can divorce themselves from their shadow. I accept that my actions have a range of incentives. I do not live in a one-variable world. I am a complicated mess of conflicting motivations, simultaneously corrupt and innocent. As the great heretic Augustine succinctly put, "Here I stand, I can do no other." Ironic? Yes. Sincere. Also. Epicurean. You bet, with the best and worst of intentions.

I'm the cheating wrestler everyone loves to boo. I am the dickpic no one wants but everyone loves to ridicule. For me this is a cathartic exercise in failure, and what is more universal than failure? Emphasizing the taboo part of me releases the exhaust valve of repressed desire lest the pendulum of intention swings back with vicious revenge.

Letter 2

Dear Drue,

Thanks for your last letter. I thought you explained your position well. However, perhaps for the next few letters we could make our correspondence a little more casual. Please don't hold back. No need for polite formalities.

So it seems that you were most upset by my use of your instagram images, specifically the Barcelona bikini shots. For me, they were the obvious choice. My work for this show is about virtue signaling through physical prowess. That said I can see why you would be offended. I robbed you of your agency over how you are being depicted. That said, doesn't that happen with the artist-critic relationship on a daily basis?

My peers see the placement of my figure on yours as misogynistic violence. They say I am forcing a sexualized relationship by the formal juxtaposition of two half-naked figures. Personally, I think this is another example of an artist's being way too sensitive. If anything I see this piece as using a false comparison of skill to comment on my own virtue-signaling. Your poor drawing of me trying to impress you and my expert painting as of you not recognizing my existence only points to my own ineptitude.

Depiction is not advocacy. Yes, I am pointing to a context that could be seen as toxic, but I am more interested in speaking to the world as it is than as we think it ought to be. I am not writing policy. I am exploring the human condition. For fine art to reify a societal problem, it has to be able actually to move people to act in a specific way. But I don't believe in fine arts' social agency. At best it can acknowledge present circumstances and be an expression of those times. But it has no power to actually sway public action. As mentioned earlier they, you, and everyone else will inevitably put your own meaning on top of my intent. So why get upset at the intent?

What are we, the artists doing then? I think we are signaling to our group that we belong and have opinions similar to others like us. Being an artist is about being a member of a community with shared values. We make work to showcase our own ingenuity and impress each other. But the only way to do that is to show that we are all playing the same game called art. The problem is that our conversation isn't honest.

We are all engaging in a form of false solidarity. Personally I am more interested in antagonism rooted in mutual respect. I believe I can objectify you in unrequited desire, lust after your affirmation as an art critic, and respect you as a friend simultaneously.

Human behavior is too complex to categorize intentions as good or bad. In my work I want take the pretensions off the table. We are all trying to impress each other. In politics, in art, in love, we are all objectifying and using each other. Let's just be real about our intentions. I am interested in you as a friend, a critic, and an instagram girl.

Wyatt

Letter 3

Dear Drue,

I agree with you about the kickboxing class comment. This collaboration has really been a pain in the ass. Worthwhile for sure but a sincere pain in the ass. Ok so here we go:

First, I take great pride in entertaining the masses with my self deprecating instagram stories. I sincerely hope I am not being boring. I'll try to up my game. So you wrote:

“Your lack of original thought brings us to the serious crisis you’re experiencing. What do white, cisgender, heterosexual men, have to bring to the table with a growing artistic sphere that embodies a movement of social justice, unraveling every facet of your normative identity?”

I have to agree. My thought is not original. I am a stand-in. But I think the real crisis is about how the cult of self-differentiation is eating its own. I am curious though, given that you believe I can only operate within the lanes of my own identity, what am I allowed to paint? And how specific does my identity get?

All this backstory is dandy, but I am curious what your impression is of the drawing itself. If you didn't know the backstory of our piece would you be into the mural?

My impression is that your marks are bold and decisive. They make clear the decision to double down on bad drawing. Your first drawing could be seen as something we stumbled upon. This acts more as a super deliberate quote. At first I think it's funny for about 5 seconds. Then it operates as a obnoxious plea for attention. After that I begin to think that how the 'the big guy', as you call it, is turning his back on any attention he might receive. Or perhaps he just wants to show off his giant muscles. Either way, he

simultaneously operates as a dismissal of the gallery space he is in while simultaneously depending on the context for meaning.

The small print next to him is just enough to reframe the grandiose optics. I am glad we didn't add the text. The one photo is a small addition to make the gesture clear enough. I am liking how distance from viewer to the works activates the framing.

Also, I am super glad we made the decision to reshoot inside the Stark Center. I think the chords dangling and crap on the studio floor would have been distracting. Plus the background of that gallery and those weights are too good not to have in the show. I also don't think that touring groups are going to want to come back to that space. Lol But these new images work better.

So what was it like making the piece? Are you happy to be done?

Wyatt

Appendix 1. Response to First Letter

Beginning late October, 2018, my collaboration with MFA student, Wyatt Ramsey, has been a dynamic dialogue surrounding traditional themes of the western art historical canon, possible ways to combat toxic masculinity in art and society, the responsibility of social justice in artistic practice, social media and art, performance as a means of power, and the true nature of interdisciplinary participation.

In response to Ramsey's initial letter, a few questions must be proposed: As art historians, critics, and artists, do we have a responsibility to serve as the catalyst for social change? This is a question to which I have not found an answer. However, if you have agency in the social arena within the US, wouldn't you choose to act?

Ramsey is not convinced.

“With regard to social praxis, we artists are inept. Art has little power to right the wrongs of social injustice. The nature/nurture debate of mass media is too long to get into for now, suffice to say that the influence of fine arts is infinitesimally smaller than that of the entertainment and advertising industries. This is largely due to the illegibility of art to a world illiterate of its' historical and theoretical underpinnings. Most people don't have the time or inclination to understand art, much less be moved by it.”

With the artist's disposition in mind, it is necessary to explain the artistic process of this event. Ramsey reached out to me to collaborate with him on a project that centers around toxic masculinity. As an undergraduate art history major, with a minor in women and gender studies, the topic of this project was intriguing. Though my professional interests are within art historical, feminist, and LGBTQX research, I also make art as a personal, therapeutic expression. My paintings are abstract representations of my own body, that I have been able to reclaim through my practice and research. Ramsey's first suggestion was that he paint a male body on top of these paintings. The nature of my abstraction did not align with Ramsey's vision for the project, which was for the best considering the nature of the collaboration that follows. We eventually decided on a documented performance, with a possible end-game product. Ramsey posed for me in

his student studio, while I drew him. The interaction was documented through photographs. My participation in this project was propelled under the conditions of an obstruction to the male gaze. We were reversing the roles of the female muse, that has laid in waiting over the last three centuries of art to be made interesting under the brush of the great, male “genius artist.”

Ramsey and I looked at this performance and product as a success. It playfully worked to degender traditional roles of art making, while also posed thoughtful ideas about the nature of the relationship between artist and art historian. Does the creator or commenter really hold the power?

Returning from our university’s winter break, Ramsey contacted me about possibly building from this initial collaboration for part of his spring show. He wanted to create something from my initial drawings, potentially creating paintings within them or on top of them.

This is where I begin my critique on this collaboration, and Ramsey’s artistic agenda.

In my opinion, I felt we succeeded in the role reversal between artist and muse. I found it interesting that this was also done through three different mediums: performance, drawing, and photography. I was fully behind the ideas that we never had even planned on evoking from this collaboration, in terms of the relationship between artist to art historian, creator to commenter, and even issues within our department in terms of dialogue between studio art and art history, and undergraduates to graduate students. This section was both playful and fruitful.

In section two of this engagement, Ramsey wanted to then take my drawings to paint on top of. To be specific, he wanted to paint another body on top of them. He wanted to complete them, as these were drawings of an amateur; these were the drawings of an amateur *female* artist. As no work by a female artist could be completed without the final touch of the male presence. This concept is nothing new to art history, and completely obstructs all of the progressive efforts we had made in exposing elements of toxic masculinity. I did not immediately end the collaboration, in hopes that we could alter this suggestion in a way that could produce a more helpful, and socially progressive

conclusion. In discussion on my reservations with Ramsey, I had an idea on the way that we could fix this. I would allow Ramsey to do this, but under my direction.

Ramsey's suggestion to complete my drawings, exposes toxic masculinity in itself. It was almost as if Ramsey's suggestion came from a subconscious resistance to keep his power as the male artist, even though the entirety of this collaboration is to expose toxic masculinity. I chose to allow him to explore these drawings further, but that I would be explicitly exposing the nature of this action if this piece ever reached the inside of a gallery. I allowed this as a learning experience for Ramsey, and an additional layered exploitation of toxic masculinity. At this point in our collaboration there was not a definite manner to which this would be expressed. Whether I would write an excerpt of writing on the gallery wall, or have to spray paint profanities on his final production, my voice in the collaboration would be heard. Otherwise, the collaboration would be over.

One night in mid- February, after about five months of collaborative discussion, I opened an Instagram story to find a photo of myself that Ramsey had taken off of my Instagram and painted. He then projected and traced one of my previous drawings of him, directly onto the canvas. The drawing was of a male figure standing straight, with his hands behind his head, and Ramsey had placed this figure directly over my body. This photo was a bikini shot of myself with a cowgirl hat on that I had posted last summer in Barcelona. Out of 918 photos I have on my Instagram, this is the photo that he decided to choose without my knowledge or authorization.

“Paintings are art objects to be felt, not people to be respected. They are wet expressions fondled with the brush.”

This suggestion was not an option. Not only was it not an option, but it threatened the entire collaboration. We had had such sincere conversation for five months about female agency and elevation in artistic practice, using this as a means to challenge toxic masculinity. It was as if every time I, the female collaborator, gained agency, Ramsey was compelled to rail against it. He used my photo, and ultimately my body, to his disposal. The layering of bodies was a crude, sublime interaction that silenced my participation.

“My work is about positioning well placed contrarian jokes with the most sincere conviction. It is a kind of playful tinkering with the mechanisms of fickle ideology that takes itself too seriously. Not a particular ideology but ideology itself. I am exploiting the contexts that others find meaningful but I find trite and empty. My failures is meant to disarm by giving the audience a temporary sensation of superiority and perhaps remind them what they have been are fighting for all along. Plus it's just fun to play the transgressor.”

In my opinion, this image did not touch sincere, but instead was a visual representation of “locker room talk.” It should be a privilege to use female bodies for male artistic production, not an obvious choice of material. Although I was okay with Ramsey painting over my drawings, this image disturbed any agency that a mere excerpt of my writing on the gallery wall, could have achieved.

We went back and forth, arguing what this painting essentially symbolized. The most infuriating part was when he argued that many of his female colleagues, versed in concepts of the male gaze, found it funny, not oppressive. The problem with this, is that he asked me to collaborate with him on this, not them. It was my photo he chose off of my Instagram, and my body that he painted a half- nude, male figure on, not theirs. He sexualized my participation without my authorization, not theirs. In this moment our collaboration took a pause. I also did not have the energy at that point to write a response to his writing, for it would have sounded a little something like this:

“I enjoy art that begins and ends with questions.” How innovative of you.

“I prefer to play the heretic or the contrarian. They are catalyzing.” You have succeeded.

“Heretics hone thinking, or at the very least least challenge groupthink. They question the orthodoxies of their own tribe at the expense of their own alienation, not for the sake of martyrdom but because they can't bare to be herded.” This seems contradictory. You are saying that you placed your half naked body on my half naked body, not because you are trying to play the martyr in getting those to think about the

consequences of toxic masculinity? But, because you cannot be mainstream in terms of social activist artist that believe in gender equality. Also, no one really wants to hear a white male use the word “tribe” so many times.

Perhaps Ramsey doesn’t directly advocate and believe in the power of social justice through art, or pick an explicit “tribe,” because the current systematic structures of power in the American political and artistic sphere, protect his identity. If marginalized communities at the intersection of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, immigration status, and disability, to name a few, begin to rise above the identity of the traditional “norm,” his work may suffer. In my unapologetic opinion, it is a privilege to not pick a side. Yes, there will be collateral damage in the polarization of a society, but dichotomies will always exist. The war is going to go on whether you want to be a part of it or not. Unlike Ramsey, I am delightfully honored to carry my pitchfork. Ramsey’s choice to remain unaffected in issues of social justice, is found within the same strain of rational used in his unauthorized bikini painting of me, that is somehow sincerely humorous, and not a sexualized projection and reclamation of patriarchal authority.

In addition to this, I do not buy in to the idea that art is meaningless to our current society. I do agree that there are elitist boundaries that create barriers within artistic practice and art institutions. However, I think that this a problem that can be solved, and hope that this piece will serve to open up a space of dialogue for more accessible art spaces. If art has no power, why are we even doing this?

Eventually, I had to put my mature, feminist art history hat back on, and communicate with Ramsey on how to clean up his mess.

The fortunate thing about our collaboration, is that our forgiveness rebound is around 24 hours despite biting text messages and word documents. The painting was destroyed, and together we chose new imagery for a final production. Although the final pieces to this collaboration are still in progress, there are already many meaningful conclusions to draw from. This was a growing experience for both of us, in terms of what it means to collaborate on difficult topics, and specifically, when your opinions are both polarized and personally grounded. Our collaboration highlights the need for more discussion surrounding toxic masculinity in art history, and how to go about this in a way that is both ethically grounded and challenging. Sometimes even in trying to promote awareness and activism, we reinforce oppressive structures. Our collaboration serves as

several checks and balances to our respective opinions, objectives, and audiences.

My hope in this collaboration is to have visually communicated two opposing dispositions of socially activated art, questioning who is responsible in promoting awareness and change, or a simplistic commentary. I hope to have created a display that advocates for both sides equally, leaving it up to the viewer to decide who holds the power.

Appendix 2. Response to Second Letter

Dear Boring Instagram Man,

After spending about four hours writing an extremely long-winded, borderline-diabolical response back to your second letter, I have purged this negativity and have returned to my physiological equilibrium. I can now formulate a response to your ignorant letter, that, in no way, reflects an acknowledgement of my extraordinarily well-written, entertaining, and educational (to you specifically) initial letter.

There is one line (part of it) within this letter we can agree on.

“If anything I see this piece as using a false comparison of skill to comment on my own virtue-signaling. Your poor drawing of me trying to impress you and my expert painting as of you not recognizing my existence only points to my own ineptitude.”

You are correct. My affection, recognition, and respect as a woman, artist, critic, friend and Instagram girl, does not take kindly to the ignorance of a white, cisgender, heterosexual male artist that throws away his talent in order to follow the same path of cultural and identity appropriation that has been repeated for centuries. You’re virtue signaling and objectification of me is unoriginal.

Your lack of original thought brings us to the serious crisis you’re experiencing. What do white, cisgender, heterosexual men, have to bring to the table with a growing artistic sphere that embodies a movement of social justice, unraveling every facet of your normative identity? Art no longer accepts white supremacy and patriarchy as genius. The roles have been reversed in this participation. That is what you wanted right?

The continuous actions and words that you use to reclaim your power - the illegal use of my Instagram photos, your consistent sexualization of me, your continuous motivation to flatten my participation as an artist and critic by referring my work as amateur, and your curatorial question if I would like my writing to run off the walls, onto the floor (so you can continue to walk all over my practice) - are flaccid. I am regretful to inform you that

you're going to have to find more innovative ways in your artistic methodology if you want to talk about identity. Or, perhaps, just stick to your subjects of pale white men, random cocker spaniels, and half white men- half mules.

If your white, cisgender, heterosexual male mind is not following this letter thus far, I can loan you both of my freshman year survey textbooks for further information on your condition. And next, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

I don't buy into your argument regarding the sociopolitical spheres as mutually exclusive to art. Our systems of government, politics, and society will not change without a radical distribution to American culture at the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, immigration status, etc.

"My peers see the placement of my figure on yours as misogynistic violence. They say I am forcing a sexualized relationship by the formal juxtaposition of two half naked figures. Personally, I think this is another example of artist's being way too sensitive." Would you be more sensitive to this imagery if you were a sexual assault survivor?

So, for the purpose of my argument grounded in social advocacy: What's an example of social elevation through cultural enlightenment? Art. Radical, disturbing, angry, brave, obnoxious, socially activated, resilient art. All you are to me is an artist that is fighting tooth and nail to save your own identity that is protected under the archaic ways of art history. No one cares to see art that is "commenting" or "exploring" the human experience, especially when that experience that you feel you have the right to speak on, is not within your own identity bracket. You are privileged if you only feel compelled to "comment" and "explore." Our society needs someone that's more creative, sincere, and empowering than that. We need an artist with the gumption to act.

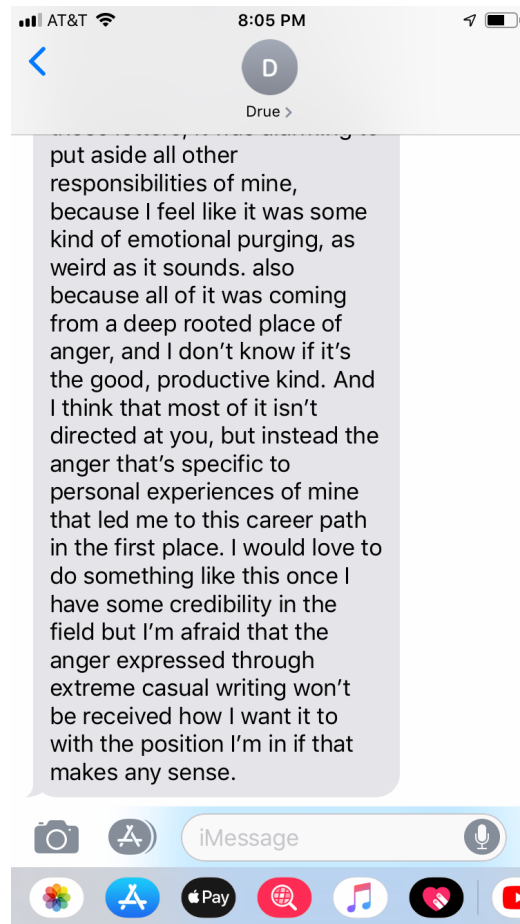
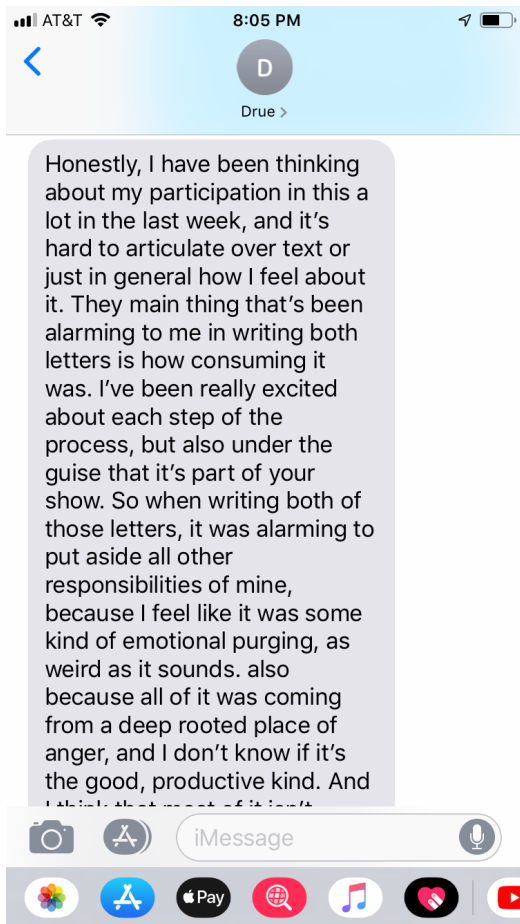
You have immense talent, and I believe that your work will be very well received because of your painterly abilities. Luckily for you, you're in Texas, so they won't, for the most part, expect radical social change.

This collaboration has felt like a kickboxing class. I truly thank you for this exercise of intellectual strength, stamina, and patience. I apologize if I didn't quite fit the mark of the unintelligent, amateur, floosy Instagram girl that you initially thought you were messaging in October. Social media is deceptive, and so our girls in white bikinis and cowgirl hats. Unlike you, I am not making fun of my narcissism and wit in this participation, I am celebrating it. Did you ever consider that perhaps I was never "virtue signaling," but instead, carrying out each post, each art piece, and each art historical writing of mine, for the gratification of myself?

Sincerely,

Your seven-Years away, Dr. Instagram Girl

Appendix 3. Text Message



Appendix 4. Exhibition Statement

“It is not a question of knowing whether this interests you, but rather of whether you yourself could become interesting under new conditions of cultural creation.”

- *Guy Debord*

The seven months of artistic collaboration between MFA student, Wyatt Ramsey, and myself, reflect the nature of Debord’s challenging statement. How do we as artists and critics become both ambitious and ethically engaged in the shifting spaces of art, politics and identity? In this piece we address the traditional gendered roles of artist and muse, as well as the relationship between artist and critic.

The imagery that you see here is a symbolic remnant of an interdisciplinary performance, participation, and collaboration. We present our viewers with a brief mapping of our process, in order to leave this conversation open-ended within a few realms: agency, intrigue, identity, art, activism and tradition.

Or, perhaps, the big guy will only serve to perplex, rather than radically motivate thought. In this case, we hope this work will, at the very least, serve as an example of productive interdisciplinary collaboration within UT Fine Arts.

Drue Henegar, BA Art History

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Figure 3. & 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

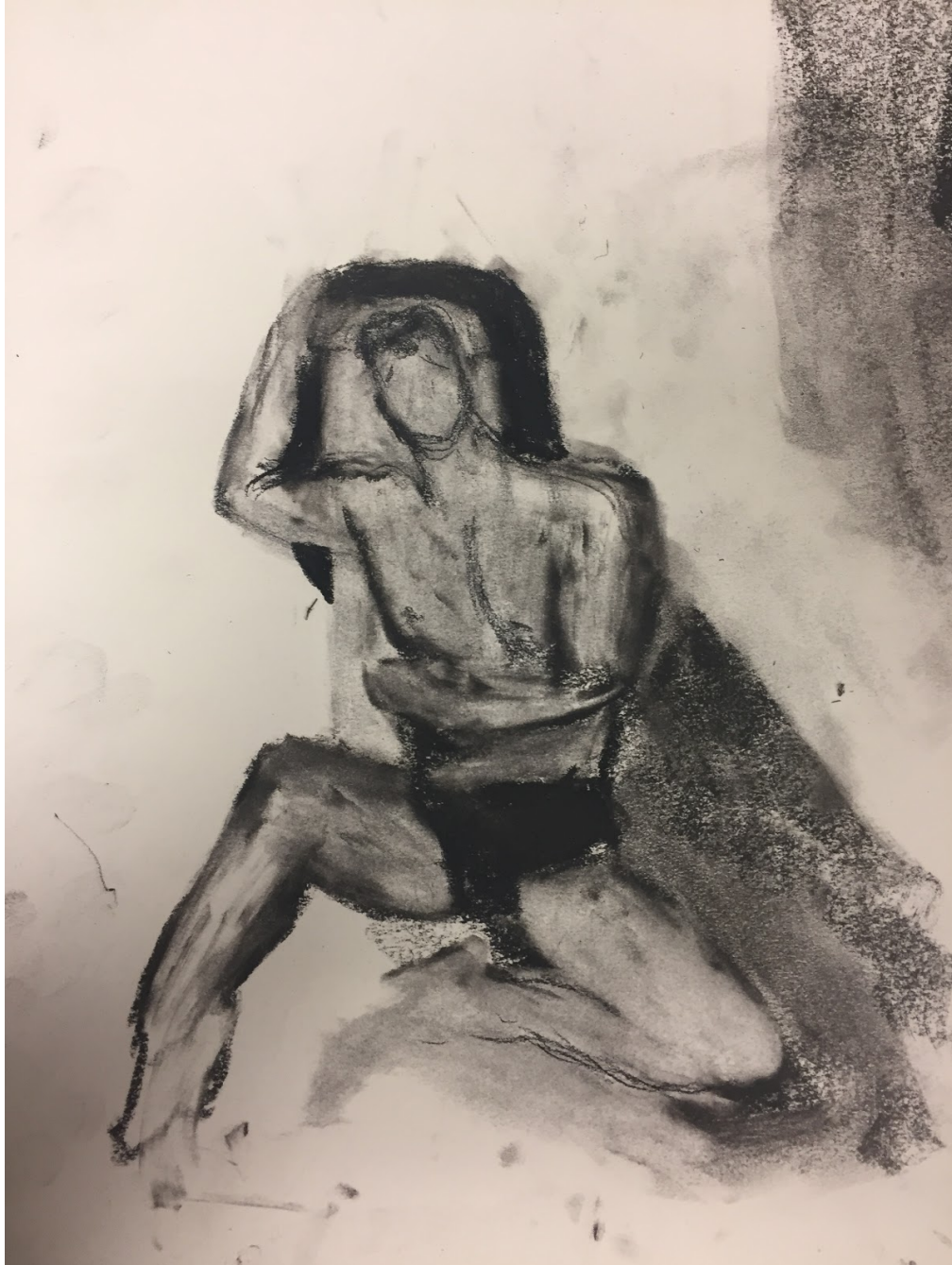


Figure 7.



Figure 8

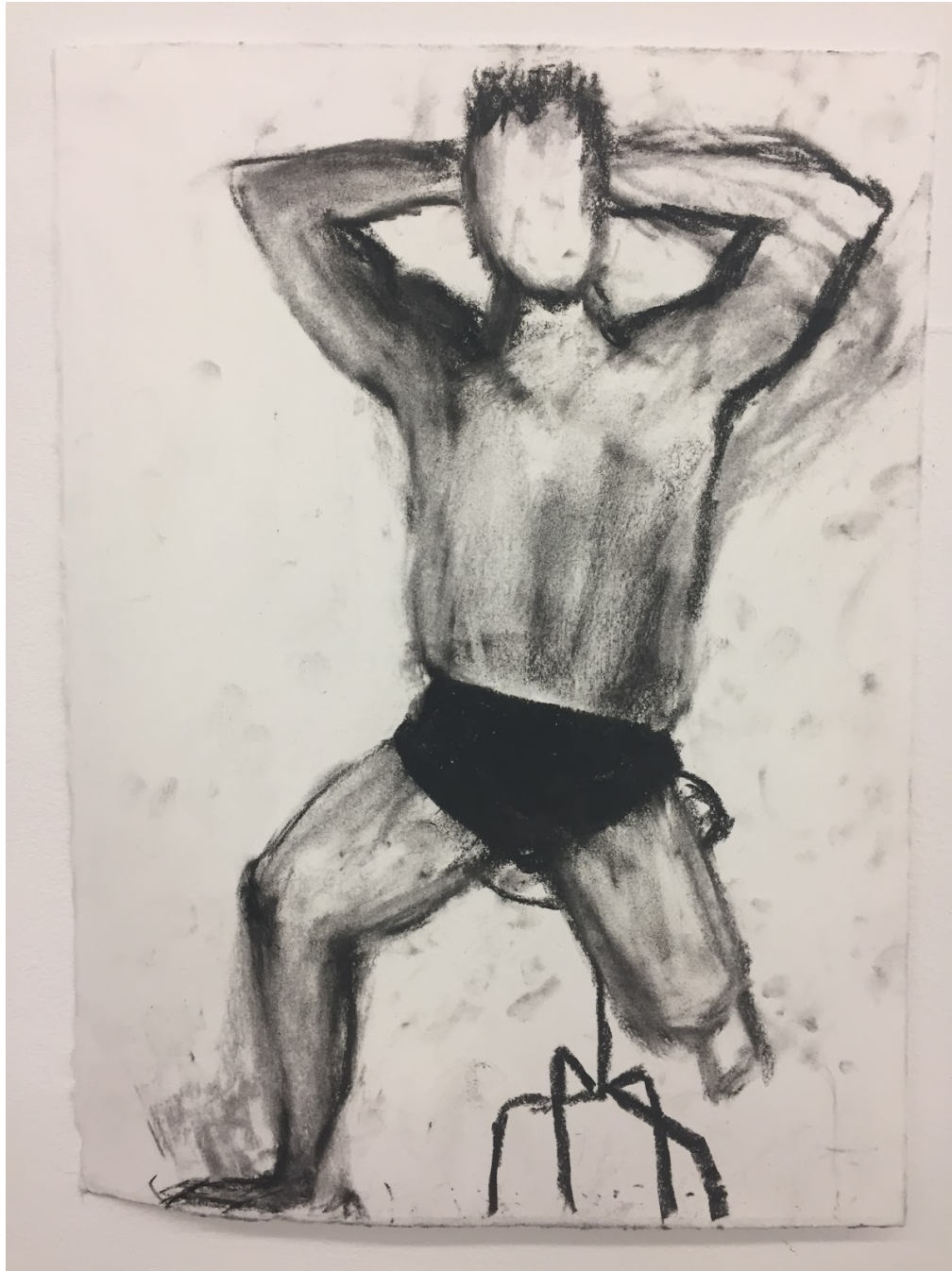


Figure 9. & 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.



Figure 13.



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