



Dan Lydersen

My recent paintings are a reconciliation between past and present, particularly in regard to Western culture's notions of spirituality and the relationship between society and nature. Drawing from a variety of contemporary and historical sources, the paintings are an attempt to come to terms with the present through the immediate marriage of today's visual culture with that of the past. Both theatrical and satirical, comical and somber, the paintings pose a view of humanity that is steeped in the existential turmoil that lies between materiality and spirituality, where society trudges persistently forward while the human search for meaning and purpose as mortal animals remains unresolved.

Having its roots in the Renaissance and manifesting itself in all manner of contemporary media, the notion of the rectangle as a window into an alternate reality has become an inherent mode of viewing in human culture. Whether via canvas, computer or television screen, there exists an eager willingness to suspend one's disbelief and subscribe to the illusion of simulated space depicted on a two-dimensional surface. In my work, this notion of the rectangle as window is utilized to present fragments of narratives that are

Akupara, Oil on canvas, 12" x 16" Akupara re-imagines an old helicopter landing-pad that stood adjacent to my old studio. Every time I entered or exited the building, the concrete tower loomed overhead and I would imagine a spectre of myself stranded up there.

imbued with a degree of reality while also recognizing themselves as fictional constructs. Consisting of familiar archetypes from historical painting to contemporary popular culture, these narratives seek to draw focus on the grotesqueness, beauty, comedy, and horror that lie just beneath the surface of the ordinary. In this way, the rectangle is not only a window but also a kind of fun house mirror that reflects an image of the real world while distorting it into something otherworldly.

The images themselves come from many different places. Some are calculated references to art history or contemporary culture and others are the result of free association, improvisation or imaginative flights of fancy. Some paintings aspire towards coherent satire or self-reflexive commentary on the nature of painting while others use history and current events as a loose foundation for constructing open-ended narratives. Some paintings are simply imaginative explorations executed for the sake of satisfying my own curiosity. In any case, central to each painting is a particular worldview that seeks to balance tragedy with comedy, beauty with ugliness, and rationality with uncertainty.





Soft Serve, 60" x 36", Oil on canvas (page 15) In *Soft Serve* the conventional ploys of fast food advertising have been twisted into a child's candy-land fantasy gone awry. Surrounded by the plastic junk-food toys that are used to initiate the young into specific habits of consumption, a plump little baby reveals a peculiar amused acceptance of the lactose baptism being administered by an overly-saccharin costumed character. Invoking the Camel Joes and Ronald McDonalds of the world, this character exhibits an illusory benevolence whose menacing undertones are further accentuated by the infestation of pigeons creeping in from every corner.

Little Lamb, 48" x 36", Oil on canvas (Pg. 17) *Little Lamb* employs the familiar trope of aristocratic portraiture to construct a character as an emblem of the patriarchal posturing exhibited in U.S. foreign policy. For many years the U.S. has posed itself as a protector and defender of freedom and democracy throughout the world, but its interventions in other countries often end up making situations worse. Sometimes this is an unfortunate bungling of good intentions but often these interventions are backhanded ways of attempting to further our own nation's prosperity in the name of certain political ideals. Standing above his flock of sheep with an air of smug self-importance, the boy shepherd in *Little Lamb* is an embodiment of these tendencies in U.S. foreign relations. Convinced that he is wise and powerful beyond his years, the young shepherd's ineffectuality and self-deception are evidenced by the sheep carcass at his feet and the useless plastic gun he holds in his hand. One of his flock chews at a sore on its diseased leg while another hangs skinned from a tree. Meanwhile the boy flaunts his machismo by donning various relics of American sports and military culture, from his foam "Number One!" finger and cowboy hat to the red-white-and-blue ribbons, flowers, and feathers that decorate his naval-like uniform.

Ronald, 12" x 12", Oil on panel (Above) With the increase of globalization, the hegemony of advertising culture has become nearly absolute. There are fewer and fewer places in the world where the iconic golden arches aren't looming somewhere on the horizon like the double-headed eagle of the Roman Empire. *Ronald* is a painting that simply re-imagines the omnipresence of global business culture and mass advertising as a familiar kidnapping scenario involving a scary clown and a frightened child.

Vivarium, 16" x 12", Oil on canvas (At right) *Vivarium* is another painting that seeks to reveal the strangeness of ordinary life. The painting is a personal response to the slight culture shock experienced relocating from an urban environment to an idyllic little city in the country. Crime, homelessness, and trash-littered streets were replaced by perfectly manicured grass lawns, topiary and immaculately clean sidewalks. Living on the edge of town, one could not ignore the abrupt division between a controlled environment and the more wild and rural land beyond, which only accentuated the artificiality of the town's order and cleanliness. And so the comfort and bounty of a typical American town came to resemble a kind of vivarium, where all one's needs seemed to be easily provided for and protected against the outside world. The notion is simply an illusion though, and the boundaries between civilization and wilderness remain as purely human constructs.







The More Things Change, Oil on Canvas, 14" x 18" (above) In this day and age the philosophy behind Manifest Destiny and British Imperialism may seem extinct, but to what extent does it still reveal itself in the various wars and economic struggles between present-day nations? Many images of racism and violence from the past decade are suspiciously reminiscent of colonialism in the U.S. and Britain. Based on a 19th Century illustration of British soldiers practicing their swordsmanship on effigies of Indian stereotypes, *The More Things Change* re-presents the historical image as a carnival cutout attraction with trompe l'oeil peeling paint. This painting within the painting, while in a state of gradual decay, is still quite recognizable and is available to any participant who's willing to climb behind it and put their face where the soldier's ought to be. The implication is one of shared responsibility in either the maintenance or the final abolition of the remnants of imperialism.

Self-Portrait with Piercing and Periscope, Oil on canvas, 16" x 12" (At right) This painting is a play on the age-old genre of self-portraiture and the relationship between appearance and identity. Not a statement so much as an exploration, the painting is an attempt to depict an anonymous self whose character is manifested almost solely in the external.

Dan Lydersen

www.danlydersen.com
dan@danlydersen.com

