

Get A Load

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As a kid, I was always very quiet and in my own little world. I would just have a few small toys like the jungle book figurines and a coloring book with a few crayons packed in my mom's purse everywhere I went. You could give me absolutely anything to play with, forks, a napkin, or even a straw and my imagination would make it work. I would turn that napkin into a pony running through the meadows to save the fairy princess from the fork who is an angry beast. Even growing up I was very quiet and kept to myself, listening to others and watching them very carefully while I silently laughed here and there if a joke was made. Even now I have a resting bitch face but truly am very giggly and laugh at anything and if it's really funny, I'll laugh about it for hours and randomly think about it. Cartoons were also a comfort show. I loved the caricatures and how dramatic and silly the stories were. The Boomerang channel was always on, causing my cousin and I to argue when we lived together because she wanted to watch Disney channel and I thought it was stupid and totally not funny. My favorite shows were Scooby Doo, Pink Panther, Yogi Bear, Tom and Jerry, The Flintstones and the Looney Tunes.

During junior and senior year I began creating paintings and illustrations containing a variety of caricatures, cartoons and sometimes animals doing the most obscure and outrageous things and toying with the struggles and scenarios of everyday life. It either doesn't make sense, or there is so much going on you don't even realize something at first glance. Humor, imagination and excitement plays a large role in my work and the idea is to make the viewer laugh and to (sometimes) relate to my work. Rather than laughing at our everyday human struggles I laugh with it, combining fun, drama and confusion in the use of saturated and bright acrylic paints in combination with absurd and exaggerated shapes, I enhance the humorous qualities. I bend and alter the figures' limbs, making them bend in ways that aren't humanly possible. The vibrant colors make it more exciting and adventurous, like you want to jump into the piece and figure out what's going on.

From the constant crime to the excessive hatred that goes on every second of every day, this world is sad and horrible to live in. My art does not focus on talking about political issues, cultural issues, insecurities, the male gaze, etc. My work contains farce content and the humor I try to bring is a distraction from reality, I want the viewer to lighten up, to escape with me for a moment or two to just laugh. We tend to forget how wild our imagination can be like when we were young. As we get older we need to be more responsible but the world gets more wild and unsettling. Sometimes it is hard to be happy when there is so much going on around us that is unfortunate and frightening to understand. The tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy is called *escapism*¹.

The Looney Tunes² is the perfect example of absurdity because it is full of absurd physics that are so impossible to happen especially all at once that it makes it funny. Critic Emily Vanderwerff explains that the show “offers a comprehensive course in slapstick humor, wisecracks, and classical music. In every single short, there’s a sense of barely restrained anarchy, of wild and glorious violence about to burst forth from every corner.”³ This is everything you could ever want in a cartoon. It’s so stupidly crazy and makes no sense at all, it’s funny. You go from having a character telling another character a list of things he must do and physically moving so fast to build so much at once it is impossible, but he is so stressed he is trying to move fast, to having someones’ phone vibrating so hard that he is vibrating and falls out the window, into a tree, gets attacked by bees, and then a piano falls down on him and then when he runs down the stairs he trips and slams down all 1,000,000 staircases all the way to the bottom. What makes it so enjoyable, entertaining and funny is the fact that it is an expressive mouthful in such a small timeframe over something so simple.

¹ “Escapism Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster.” *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America’s Most-Trusted Online Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/escapism>. Accessed 19 Apr. 2022.

² Channel, Cartoon. *LOONEY TUNES BIGGEST COMPILATION: Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and More!* YouTube, 8 Apr. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM6xvpzqCUA>.

³ James, Emily St. “Looney Tunes, Explained by a 4.75-Year-Old - Vox.” *Vox*, Vox, 23 June 2020, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2020/6/23/21294713/looney-tunes-hbo-max-review-critic-at-small-bugs-bunny-girl>.

The term “slapstick”⁴ comes from the Italian word *battacchio* which in English, it literally means slap-stick. During the 16th century, they came up with this term in Italian theatre when they were making a prop consisting of two flat boards joined by a hinge. This prop was folded up and snapped against another actor’s body to create a sound effect similar to a slap. The idea was to use this prop as a way of exaggerating physical activity that exceeds the reality of it. I incorporate the idea of nonsense comedy in my work in many ways such as by enlarging items that usually are not enlarged but provide dramatic effect or placing objects or scenarios that don’t make sense in real life. For example in my painting “Check Up”, it depicts an open mouth and through the mouth you see a dentist, whose eyes are elongated, and super close and focused on the filthy teeth. In one hand he is holding a saw and the other he is holding a hammer. While they may not use these tools at the dentist, they sure do use absurd tools that hurt so incredibly bad and feel as if they might as well be a saw and hammer. To finish it off, the dentist is asking “SO DID YOU FLOSS TODAY?!?!” because they always ask us when it is hard to speak since we have to keep our mouth open, so they can lodge the sharpest tools ever. I want the viewer to imagine the feeling and reminiscence of this experience but also laugh at how dramatic it is yet relatable.

The Art Of Slapstick⁵ by Jake Bourke discusses relief, superiority and incongruity, which are a few theories that have come around defining humor and how it speaks to the viewer. Plato and Aristotle believed that “The superiority theory is the theory of enjoying someone's unfortunate ending”.⁶ This relates to my work and the piece “Who Put The Table There!!!”. In the piece a figure is twisting their arm awkwardly and holding their foot that we can assume is injured by the overly sized big toe that is a vibrant fuschia and red. We can assume that they stubbed their foot on the table, as in society that is a common event that happens to many of us frequently. We aren’t laughing or amused at the fact that

⁴ “Slapstick Humor - The Complete Guide to Slapstick Comedy.” *Witty Companion*, 5 Sept. 2021, <https://wittycompanion.com/slapstick-humor/>.

⁵ “The Art of Slapstick - Work of Bourke.” *Yumpu.Com*, Yumpu.com, <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/10338216/the-art-of-slapstick-work-of-bourke>. Accessed 19 Apr. 2022.

⁶ Bourke, Jake. *Chapter 1: Humor, Slapstick, and Mirthless Laughter*. 2012, p. 10.

they stubbed their toe but rather that it is dramatic how they hold it, how oversized and saturated the toe is and the figure's facial expression is dramatic but relatable.

Sigmund Freud explains that the relief theory is when “laughter occurs due to the release of restrained energy associated with the repression of socially taboo behavior or forbidden thoughts. Laughter allows us to release the anxiety associated with withholding these forbidden impulses”.⁷ There are many actions that are considered taboo behavior or forbidden impulses. Some are extreme such as not being allowed to have an abortion, committing suicide, drinking alcohol while pregnant, sex before marriage, eating pork or even simply celebrating holidays. Then there are those that come from our body that are considered disgusting and so rude to do especially in public, such as burping out loud, talking about taking a shit, spitting or farting in public. I think we all have experienced being at the supermarket and walking down the aisle to grab your favorite box of cereal and suddenly you get wafted by a horrific smell clearly coming from one of the two people that are also there and you just shake your head in disgust. Meanwhile, you probably have farted in public before without a care in the world, maybe a little embarrassed but you gotta do what you gotta do. In a current piece I am working on, I illustrate two figures at the grocery store on line ready to pay. One figure is dramatically lifting up his leg and nonchalantly letting out a big ole fart while he loads his groceries onto the conveyor belt. The person behind him is clearly disgusted at this behavior covering her nose and dramatically dropping her groceries because of how horrific the smell is. Again, while this, and many other actions are seriously so wrong to do, you can't really do much but laugh. We are so stressed about a wide range of things and so in our own world that when we find something that we can laugh at, we do so to release the tension that we are holding.

The incongruity theory of humor by Immanuel Kant is explained to be “a moment when we get something we were not expecting”.⁸ This basically means that we tend to laugh when we don't expect

⁷ Bourke, Jake. *Chapter 1: Humor, Slapstick, and Mirthless Laughter*. 2012, p. 10-11.

⁸ Bourke, Jake. *Chapter 1: Humor, Slapstick, and Mirthless Laughter*. 2012, p. 11.

something crazy or abnormal to happen in a situation. In my work I focus a lot on making a situation that is abnormal and unexpected. Things are never clear, it's always is it going to be this or that. Such as my rendering of the classic painting of The Girl With The Pearl Earring smoking a blunt which is not very classy of her nor would she have done that at that time. Or in my piece of a figure pumping their gas and everything that they are not supposed to do, they are doing such as being on their phone, and smoking. Unfortunately their gas is leaking and they are tangled up in the pump cord. But they don't realize as they are too invested into their phone clearly as their nose is so up against it. Only you, the viewer, can imagine what happens next. A possible fire? An explosion? Or maybe a sweet civilian saves their life?

Through my extensive list of artists, I am constantly looking at the shapes of Henri Matisse, the grotesque figures of Gladys Nilsson, the wildly gestural figure paintings of Dana Schutz, the pop surrealist and fusionist Allison Zuckerman, satirical artist Robert Colescott, and pop surrealist Peter Saul. All these artists have shown me a wide range of techniques, ideas and ways of depicting humor within us.

One of the biggest inspirations for my whacky shapes and saturated color comes from the artist Peter Saul. He says "I enjoy finding a low subject and bringing it up high. I think with strong technique, you can glamorize certain things. You can make the imagery sharper, rounder, and basically better looking." This is something I do in my work a lot. I find a subject or scenario to display and I run with it in so many directions and expand and add as much as I can until I think it is enough.

A lot of my work is inspired by Chicago Imagists and Hairy Who? member, Gladys Nilsson whose work contains these huge and grotesque characters that are bent strangely and uncomfortably inside humorous situations and scenes with various viewpoints in saturated watercolors. John Yau, says "Her work is weird, funny, creepy, screwball, sexual, unabashed and impolite.....there is something weirdly

cheerful about Nilsson's women, no matter the situation or what surrounds them."⁹ Like Nilsson, I purposely use saturated colors to make the situation more exciting and cheerful for entertainment. There is also a whirl of emotions that one might feel towards the characters when looking at my work. You want to laugh but also you feel afraid of what may happen next. One of my drawings makes fun of the idea of people feeling like someone is in their home or it may be haunted called "Spooked". In this piece I used colored pencil and thin acrylic wash to create a vibrant story. Besides color, I used a variety of patterns to further push the craziness. On the left side of the door you have a frightened character who has a giant pee stain and a flashlight facing upward. She is staring at the door, symbolizing the first initial idea of being afraid to open the door. Meanwhile her cat is sound asleep. On the right side of the door you have a friendly ghost with a plethora of treats from watermelon to cake to pizza on the table in front of him as he munches away. There is a single light shining down on him and the fish in the dark is petrified. It's funny because it's silly that she is afraid of this ghost but also some may not help it but think what if this ghost turns harmful but then you think again, and think well everything is super colorful and vibrant he's gotta be a nice dude of a ghost.

Robert Colescott (1925-2009) was an artist who created expressionistic paintings that dealt with his African American identity and Black history. In his art career he was distinct for making satirical, politicized paintings that were deeply saturated and rich in color and characteristically expressive.¹⁰ Just like Peter Saul, he had a unique sense of humor and was not afraid to make fun of and depict controversial topics that would upset or offend someone. He focused on "storytelling, debunking myths, poking fun at accepted norms, surfacing uncomfortable truths and pushing back against blatant racism....a way of communicating the absurdity of human behavior from carnal instincts to racial prejudice. Luring his audience with broad humor and cartoon vulgarity, he rewards viewers with lush,

⁹ Yau, John. "Gladys Nilsson's Portraits of Everywoman." *Hyperallergic*, <https://hyperallergic.com/164198/gladys-nilssons-portraits-of-everywoman/>, 23 Nov. 2014,

¹⁰ *Artnet.com*, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/robert-h-colescott/biography>.

vibrant paintings and such hilarious details.”¹¹ Colescott wants to get the viewers attention and is using humor to get that attention and when you look deeper into his work you realize the serious narrative and don't laugh at it. Much of my work also focuses on absurd human behaviors and the whole idea of making fun of things we do on a day to day basis. My wild and highly saturated painting “Thank You Mom” alludes to all the moms out there who somehow do so many things at once for us. I think we all know moms can be a bit crazy sometimes especially when trying to help the whole family at once. Growing up with my mom always said “oh I wish I was an octopus and had 100 arms to do everything at once” and I always laughed at the idea of her being like an octopus. In the painting I have a cadmium red monstrous and crazy looking figure with 6 hands and 3 tentacles coming out of her and she's doing a gazillion things at once. Feeding the baby, signing a paper, pouring coffee to an unknown hand, tying someone's shoes, smoking a cigarette, chopping broccoli, sprinkling food in a pot and answering a phone call.

Life isn't all fun and games always and we get trapped in the world of reality and being serious all the time because we are adults. In my senior show Get A Load I focus a lot on vibrant colors, forms and exaggeration to mock human tendencies as well as making content that is unclear. The source of my art is escapism from the harsh realities of the world and needing to find. The viewer could use their imagination as to what happens next. Let loose, imagine and laugh a little with my work and with yourself when you see yourself relating to the work. The key concepts of my artwork derives from the absurd and humorous tendencies of human nature. Elongating, dramatizing, and exemplifying the nonsensical actions that may be overlooked. It is easy to be embarrassed in what one is doing or pay no mind, however, I find joy in bringing these ridiculous tendencies to life in a manner which anyone can relate too and laugh at, as oppose to critique.

¹¹ “‘Art & Race Matters’: First Comprehensive Retrospective of Robert Colescott Opens at CAC Cincinnati This Week - Culture Type.” *Culture Type*, 18 Sept. 2019, “---.” *Culture Type*, 18 Sept. 2019, <https://www.culturetype.com/2019/09/18/art-race-matters-first-comprehensive-retrospective-of-robert-colescott-opens-at-cac-cincinnati-this-week/>.