

Alyssa Torres

Senior Thesis

Fresh Out Of The Womb

I create uncomfortable oil paintings and drawings that make the viewer question what they're looking at, taking inspiration from horror movies. I explore childhood fears within a comical sensibility and find a lot of reference images online of children with mascots or clowns to incorporate into my work. My work at the moment consists of drawings I make in pencil and ballpoint pen of babies/children in humorous situations that I often make more comical with text. Baby pictures and family photos are funny; it's interesting to see how different and silly a family you don't know can be, just based off of a photo. We make children take photos with random strangers dressed as tv characters or holiday mascots without thinking about how odd it is. I also do oil paintings of photoshop collages I make with these found images, and recently I've been putting these images into an AI generator and making pieces based off of what's generated. These AI paintings help to exaggerate how weird these situations are. Animation has always been an interest of mine and I had the opportunity this year to experiment with the medium this year, although I haven't included it in my final project. I also experiment with 3D sculpture, specifically ceramics, and make them more painterly.



“Newborn”, “Toddler”, “Child”, Oil on wood, 4x4in.

These paintings are coasters. They depict children with party clowns who are unhappy about their presence. The clowns all have a similar expression as the child they are posing with, but with the opposite emotion. An example is the first one titled “Newborn” where they have mouths open but the baby is crying/screaming in fear while the clown is happy and laughing. What I’m showing here is the fear children have of clowns and how it’s odd that parents would have clowns at birthday parties and make kids pose with them. As a kid, you don’t have control of what you surround yourself with which is scary. That is what I show through my paintings. I used oil paint because the texture helps show the griminess of the clowns as well as my color choices; I painted them differently than the children.

Childhood is kind of a scary thing because children are fully dependent on who’s taking care of them and those people are responsible for everything that the child learns and is introduced to. Children are lost and don’t know what’s going on without someone to guide them which is a scary thing to think about and there’s so many things they just don’t understand. Do they know what dreams are? Do we even know if they have them? They can’t really explain what that even is to us and we’d sound crazy trying to explain it back. They probably think

everything on tv is real, I know I did when I was a child. If they accidentally turn the tv on and see a death in a movie/show they're probably terrified, thinking that it's real. And then there's the topic of character costumes. Children watch their favorite shows and then go out somewhere and see this character in real life and we just expect them to accept it and take a picture with it but half the time they are terrified! (Also side note, we force kids to take photos way too much, I've seen miserable kids being forced to take a bunch of photos at a time and they just don't want it and that's when you get that super fake, tired smile or just straight up crying or unhappiness in the photo). To sum things up, I think being a child is scary and we don't really think about that, and that's what I'm exploring in this project.



“Dipsy”, Oil on canvas, 18x24in

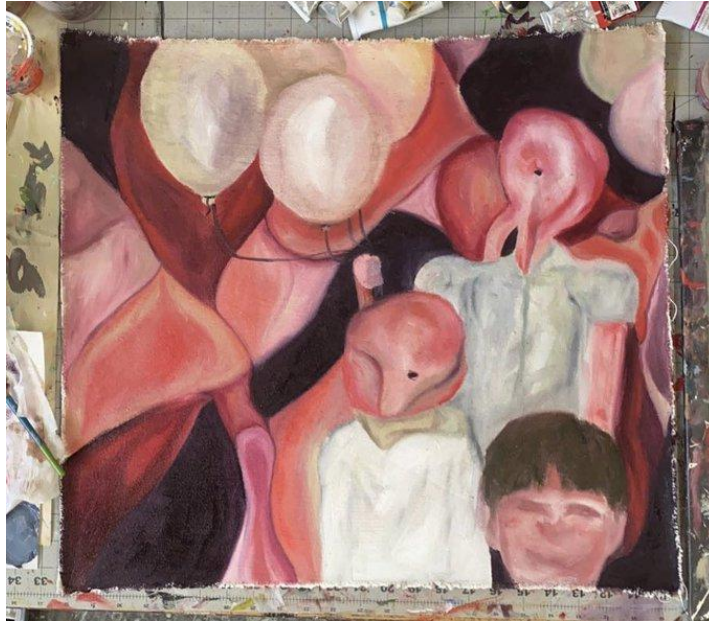
The same idea of children being scared of clowns is painted here, this time with character mascots. I've always thought it was creepy for adults to go around dressed as characters from kids shows (especially in Times Square where they can be aggressive about it) and take pictures

with kids. A lot of the time the costumes are off-brand which makes them scarier. I also think it's deceitful to children, making them think their favorite cartoons are real when they're not.

Another issue that comes up is when parents force their kids to take pictures not only with mascots, but just in general. There's always so many forced smiles in photos because believe it or not, children have feelings and they don't always like having a camera shoved in their face just because you find them cute.

I decided to make the eyes of this teletubby into faces to further push the creepiness of the mascot and to emphasize the fact that there's a person in there. I put the figures in an uncomfortable situation. The use of the materials also shows this, with the paint peeling and the scratches on the wall.

The art I made last semester, and even the beginning of this semester is different from what I'm making now because I found a different way to make new, interesting compositions. I was originally finding images on the internet, altering them a little, and then painting them. The struggle with this was making them more interesting and having backgrounds. I would also focus too much on trying to make it realistic, while also making the painting "my own". Then I discovered this app that you can put images into, and a word of your choice, then it transforms it through an AI generator. Those images become my references now and the most recent works of art are from this app. The paintings are more free and creative because I'm not trying to make them look exactly like what I'm seeing, I am just interpreting it in a way that's interesting to me. This has helped me solve the "background" problem that I've always had. Coming up with interesting backgrounds is hard for me and I would often have paintings or drawings floating in blank space instead of creating an environment for them.



Untitled,oil on canvas (I will update with size later)

This was the first painting this semester that I made using the AI app. The original image was what I assumed to be a child's birthday party and then there's a figure in the back with a pig mask on holding balloons. The word I typed was "gore" and then the app made my reference image. I did a watercolor painting of it first, but it didn't feel right so I decided to repaint it with oil paints and I loved the outcome. The background is my abstract interpretation of a womb, which I have worked into other artworks this semester.

Francis Bacon is one of my favorite painters and I keep him in mind often when I paint. I enjoy his paintings a lot because of the subject matter in his paintings, which is the agony of being human, painted in an abstract and grotesque way. I find the way he handles paint very interesting with the use of dry brush painting being a consistent technique in his artwork. Again, I am drawn to the creepiness of his paintings which inspires my own paintings. The dryness in the strokes brings out the intense feelings of the figures he paints and I've been trying to make my brush strokes matter more, seeing how successful it is in his work. Bacon also paints the

space in an odd way in which you don't really know where any of these paintings take place and I've always enjoyed the sort of openness of them. Jorge Dos Diablos is an artist I found on instagram when I was 16 and I was obsessed with his paintings. He makes amazing detailed oil paintings of creatures he makes up and they inspired a series of 8 paintings I made in junior studio. His work fascinates me, it is so creative and the paintings are so smooth. A lot of them have a sort of hazy look to them which makes them feel like they're from a dream- or nightmare considering how scary they can be. I am more interested in artists I find on instagram than the artists that are talked about in art history classes and such because the art is so unique and more tailored to my liking since the algorithm works in a way to show you what you want. The old artists are also just boring to me because I've seen the same stuff a million times and crave new work, but I guess I'm also ignorant and don't care enough to look into them either. I prefer the convenience of the app in my hands at all times and I'm young and unaware of all the fascinating artists all the older people love. Some other artists that helped shape my art style are Lucas David, Allison Schulnik, and Michael Hussar.



“Womb”, Oil on Canvas, 57x36in.

This is a painting with the intention of being a blanket of sorts for another art piece I made. It is my abstract interpretation of the womb. I’ve started putting these types of visuals as backgrounds in my most recent paintings and drawings as a way to put the figures in a helpless setting. When you’re in the womb you are not conscious and completely rely on the body that is hosting you to do what’s right and to take care of you. This all circles back to having a child, this is the very beginning. You need to be careful of what goes into your body as that’s going to travel to the womb that is carrying your child. I never work this big but something in my head was telling me this painting needed as much room as possible and I impressed myself with the outcome.

I discovered Edgar Allan Poe in my library when I was in middle school. There was a book titled Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of Mystery and Madness that had stories such as The Black Cat and The Masque of the Red Death, and it had illustrations by the artist Grim Grisly. Poe

became my favorite writer because of this book, although I think I was drawn more to the illustrations. They were weird, probably the weirdest art I had seen at that point, I believe I was 11. This opened me up to a new sense of style, I got more into death and gore because of the stories and my art changed from drawing flowers and butterflies to adding blood in everything I made. I also started to draw people more and would always make them sad with blood coming out of their eyes or mouth. Another series of books that have a huge influence in my art and interests is Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark which I discovered around the same time. There's three books in the series and they all have a bunch of short scary stories usually only a page or two long and each story has a scary illustration to go with it. These drawings were really creepy and would definitely scare a child, but I loved them. I was fascinated by these drawings and again was more interested in them instead of the actual stories. The artist who did the illustrations is Stephen Gammell. The way he shades makes the drawings look so creepy and I take a lot of inspiration from his work, using it in my own drawings. He draws a lot of creepy faces which is something I often do when I doodle in my notes. Those scary little creatures are always my go to and there are so many ways to draw them.

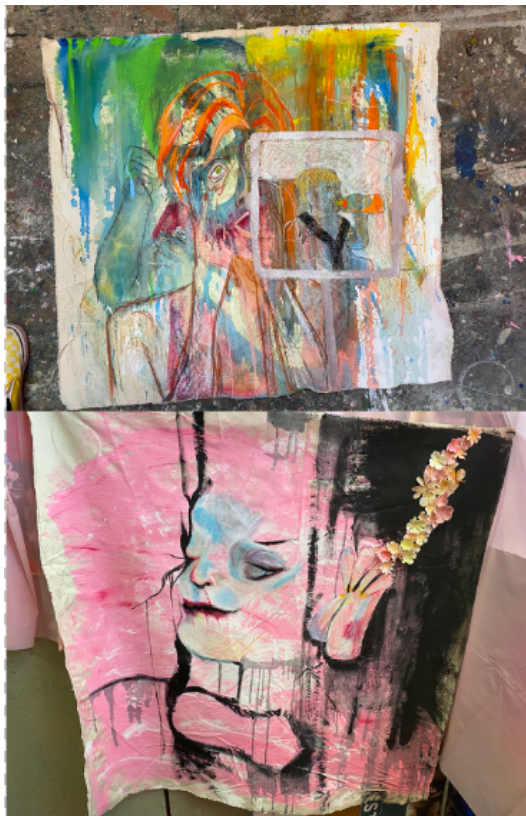


“Spider”, “Moth”, “Mantis” Watercolor on paper, 6x6in

These paintings are children painted as bugs. Bugs in general are considered to be scary or make people uncomfortable. Spiders, moths, and praying mantis are creepy and I consciously chose them. Having a child is scary to me. Having full responsibility over a human and being the one to shape them is a lot of pressure to put on someone. You determine what type of person they will turn into and have control over how they grow up. That's always been a frightening idea to me. By combining bug parts with babies, I express this fear. I used watercolor all throughout highschool because of the way it could blend and it was easy to travel with/clean up. It was also easy for me to get very fine details with tiny brushes without the paint leaving a dry brush stroke. This is a medium that feels very natural to me and I used it here because I wanted these to be smooth and light.

Horror movies play a big role in my art making process. Directors such as David Lynch and David Cronenberg are my favorites and I turn to them when I need reference because they both have amazing movies filled with body horror and intense scenes that might not even show something horrific, but just make you feel uneasy. It isn't always just about graphic special effects with them, it's also the writing, editing and the music/noises in their movies that makes them so creepy and I love using those aspects of their movies as references in my art. David Lynch likes to play with sounds and is well known for the long, drawn out static or ambient noises in his movies, such as the beginning of Eraserhead. It starts with seven long minutes of white noise and slow moving visuals of the main character in space. There's also a scene where the baby is crying a terribly annoying cry for a long period of time. These are the noises that get under your skin because he just drags them out way longer than they need to be. I've always been drawn to this genre because of the creativity behind it, especially before technology got so advanced. Special effects were so fascinating back then with the use of puppets, makeup, fake

blood, animatronics and so much more whereas now a lot of movies use an excessive amount of CGI which isn't as scary and often looks too fake to be scary. An example of great special effects makeup in Cronenberg's *The Fly* where he makes Jeff Goldblum into this disgusting fly like creature that could make anyone feel uneasy upon looking at it. There's also his film *Naked Lunch* that has typewriters that look like bugs and can speak, and characters called Mugwumps that are gross alien looking creatures with incredible detail. When I watch movies on my laptop I'll often take screenshots of scenes that look interesting to me to use later as a reference. A piece that I made inspired by Lynch is my animation. Something he does in the making of his films is just write it as he goes instead of having the whole film planned out, which is how I make my animations, and a lot of my paintings. A bad habit of mine is jumping into a painting without planning it out, which is why I would struggle with backgrounds.



Both Untitled, Acrylic and chalk pastel on canvas, 35inx40in

Something I noticed in my classes is that a lot of professors prefer big art work. There have been countless times that I've been told to go bigger with my pieces but I just don't want to. I enjoy working small/medium and don't really understand the favoritism with bigger art. I have tried multiple times to make bigger pieces and I'm almost never happy with the outcome, especially when it's forced. These two pieces were seen as a breakthrough in the eyes of some, but to me I resented them and I don't show them off. There was a brief moment that I convinced myself they were good paintings and that I should continue making stuff like that, but I quickly changed my mind and went back to doing what I like, not what others like. So, these paintings are failures in my eyes, but I'm glad I gave it a try instead of constantly turning down the big canvas.



“Fresh Out Of The Womb” Photo Album, Acrylic, Oil pastel

Various pen and graphite drawings, 9x11 in

Photo Albums are in so many households and are a great way to save memories. You can look through the pictures as many times as you want, by yourself or with people you love and reminisce over it. I wanted to make this photo album to have the same effect as those, but with my own drawings. It's a creative way to have my drawings in one place and fits along with the theme of childhood. I designed the covers to go with my paintings and ripped apart a binder so it would be an actual book. I also found plastic folders that I had to alter and then put the drawings in so I didn't have to punch holes through the actual drawings, but also to emulate a real photo album.

While I still have a long way to go, I think I've developed my artistic skills a lot since being here. I went from painting watercolor figures floating in the middle of the page to making fully developed oil paintings with actual backgrounds. Finding references, developing compositions, and taking artistic liberties with references are all skills I have developed and will expand on even more after graduation. Not worrying about the outcome or how ugly a painting looks at its halfway point is something I need to work on, though. If a painting isn't going the direction I expected it to, it usually ends up in the trash or painted over with something totally new. There's a lot of paintings that never saw the end because of my frustrations, unfortunately. I would say that I still hold myself back sometimes but overall I have experimented a lot through these four years and have come a long way.

Bibliography

Poe, Edgar Allen and Gris Grimly. Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of Mystery and Madness. Simon and Schuster, 2011

Schwartz, Alvin, and Stephen Gammell. Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark: The Complete Collection. Scholastic, 2019.

Cronenberg, David, Mark Irwin, Charles E. Pogue, Stuart Cornfeld, Jeff Goldblum, Geena Davis, John Getz, Joy Boushel, Leslie Carlson, George Chuvalo, Michael Copeman, Carol Lazare, Howard Shore, Marc Boyman, Kip Ohman, Ronald Sanders, Carol Spier, and George Langelaan. The Fly. Beverly Hills, Calif: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005.

Lynch, David, Jack Nance, Charlotte Stewart, Allen Joseph, Frederick Elmes, Jeanne Bates, Judith A. Roberts, Laurel Near, and V Phipps-Wilson. Eraserhead. United States: Absurda, 2002.

20th Century Fox ; Jeremy Thomas presents a film by David Cronenberg ; produced by Jeremy Thomas ; written and directed by David Cronenberg. Naked Lunch. [United States] :Criterion Collection, 2003.