Estoy Luchando Con Mi Vida

Senior Thesis by Martin Acevedo

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In the last three years, my work has struggled to fit in between painting and illustration. Illustration has provided me with great moments of storytelling, communicating messages and often feels like a natural way of telling a story. Painting felt focused until I found a subject I genuinely cared about. Painting things I have an interest in allows me to finally put care and focus into this new series of thesis works.

That shift happened when I started painting wrestling. Interpreting wrestling through figures and movement allowed me to finally “speak” with paint. It was a breakthrough. I was painting what I loved and that changed everything. Interpreting wrestling gave me an entry point to discover my own visual language. It allowed me to loosen up and find joy in mark-making, and to stop overthinking the process.

Some might wonder why I chose to study in a painting-focused program instead of one more centered around illustration. The reason is that I wanted the flexibility to explore both. I believed a Painting and Drawing department would give me space to incorporate illustration without restrictions, while pushing me to work through the discomfort and confusion that came with painting. That discomfort led to growth and I'm finally at a place where painting makes sense to me. I’m learning more, not just technically, but in terms of how to express myself freely through paint. Because I’m painting a subject I’m deeply familiar with and passionate about, I’m

more relaxed. There's less hesitation and fear of making mistakes. I'm gaining more control over the compositions. Some of the work may still appear stiff, at least to me, but I see that as part of the learning curve. I'm beginning to experiment more, to play with looseness and precision, and to discover what my brush and my fingers can really do.

As a result of experimentation, I've noticed my technique changing based on what I'm trying to communicate. For example, in one of my pieces a man becomes lost in the jungle and ends up wrestling a jaguar. For this painting I used acrylic and gouache paint. I mixed the gouache with the acrylic to give it a matte finish, which adds a graphic element that I enjoy. To deepen areas with darkness and shadow, I combined paint with ink, enabling me to create a bold and dynamic wash with enhanced tonal richness. When working this way, I use moments from wrestling as a starting point to help shape the narrative. I try not to stay completely true to the reference. Instead I use the composition as inspiration and then alter it to better fit the story I'm trying to convey.

I also have a series of paintings based on real-world wrestling moments where I use the physicality of painting with my hands and fingers to capture the emotion and movement. Here I abandon precise figure drawing in favor of movement, gesture, and texture. I give up brushes entirely and use my body, which brings a physicality to the work that mirrors the subject matter. Similar to my more realist works, I use wrestling matches as a foundation. However, instead of focusing on composition or building a concept from specific moments, I allow myself to interpret what I see in a much looser, more expressive way. Francis Bacon is an artist I drew inspiration from while developing this new body of work; his ability to evoke intense visual interest through marks that are simultaneously simple and complex deeply influenced my approach.. Wrestling gave me permission to loosen up, to accept the possibility of making

mistakes, and to feel less pressure to have everything fully figured out as I translate these powerful moments into a painting form. Wrestling is expressive and I want the process of these paintings to embody that same intensity.

For materials, I use acrylic and gouache. I avoid oils primarily due to their long drying time. My background in drawing, using traditional and digital media, taught me to work quickly without layering or waiting. Acrylics dry fast which supports my process. I don't have time to overthink and I make decisions in the moment. That spontaneity helps me stay focused and intuitive. I prefer to work on masonite or wood panels because of their smooth surface, which allows the paint to glide more freely. I find canvas too textured, even when sanded, and I like the immediacy that a smooth panel provides. It feels closer to paper which is more familiar to me.

Much of my artistic vision has been shaped by illustrators and animators online. Artists like Marco Bucci have been influential in teaching me about value, composition, and technical execution. I've also learned a great deal from professionals such as Jim Lee, Kim Jung Gi, Ryan Benjamin, and others whose process videos and interviews have helped solidify my technical drawing skills. Studying at Purchase has also opened me up to the world of contemporary painting. Attending exhibitions and engaging with the work of artists like Trenton Doyle Hancock, Mark Thomas Gibson, and Oscar yi Hou has shown me how illustration and painting can co-exist in contemporary art spaces. Hancock, in particular, inspired me through his ability to blend collage and illustration seamlessly within his paintings. Though I don't use collage, I've drawn from his method of integrating illustrative language into a painterly context.

When I first arrived at Purchase, I was stuck in realism. Still lifes and portraiture were familiar and safe and I was hesitant to branch into imaginative or narrative-based work. I didn't

feel confident enough to stray from what was “correct.” It wasn’t until junior year that I realized I was creatively stuck, trying to push toward illustration while still holding myself back with the limitations of realism. I tried and failed, but failure was necessary.

It wasn’t until the end of the first semester of senior year that I finally took a risk. I started painting what I loved, which was wrestling. My first piece was a Renaissance-inspired portrait of myself in a Luchador mask of Blue Demon. That gave me the confidence to begin a new series, illustrated ink drawings inspired by key wrestling moments. Eventually, I began building a narrative involving a Luchador lost in the jungle. From there, I expanded into more loose and expressive work, focusing less on defined figures and more on movement, emotion, and mark-making.

My current senior project is rooted in this exploration, how mark-making can convey meaning without relying solely on figures or literal representation. I’m learning how to use brushstrokes and gestures as a form of communication. My creative process typically starts with an imagined scene, often influenced by graphic novels or animation. It might be something emotionally resonant or visually compelling. I’ll write one sentence describing the concept, then do a rough sketch. For example, I might imagine an abandoned gym at sunset, the fading light reflecting off rusted metal equipment, or a winter night where only a street light illuminates the space. These settings help me understand the narrative before diving in. Then, I create thumbnails, more than ten, focusing on composition and lighting rather than detail. Once I find one that speaks to me, I create a rough draft and explore poses for the figures if they’re involved. The goal is to stay loose and avoid overplanning. I want the final work to feel confident and expressive, not cautious or overly refined.

In the end, my journey as an artist is about finding that balance between discipline and intuition, between storytelling and abstraction, and learning to trust myself in the process.

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“Sol Snatcher”

April 25th 2025

16 x 12 Inches

Acrylic

“ Clothesline from Hell”

April 5th 2025

24 x 24 Inches

Acrylic

“Tsunami”

April 18th 2025

24 x 24 Inches

Acrylic, Pastel Pencil

“ Wild Stomp”

April 27th 2025

36 x 17 Inches

Ink

“Eat De-feet”

April 26th 2025

14 x 14 Inches

Acrylic

“Fall from Grace”

March 16th 2025

4 x 4 Feet

Acrylic

“Claymore”

April 29th 2025

16 x 12 Inches

Acrylic