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BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

I am exhibiting several drawings, paintings, and sculptures representing a visual record of my creative research into, and my handling of, snails. Although I depict snails and their environment in a loose representational style, I have begun to incorporate digital drawing to enhance my art in a mixed media approach.

I have created illustrative images of a forest floor as I imagine it would look to a snail in a giant, menacing world. Close-up images of grass become unusual jungle scenes, and my once tiny snails achieve a measure of control in this fanciful world. The inspiration for my art is my recollection of the insecurity and struggles I encountered while growing up as a military brat.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following individuals who have helped me develop my learning process and my creative thinking skills. I thank them for their wisdom, their support through thick and thin, and their professionalism. Without my family, professors and friends I would not be who I am today, an inquisitive and unique individual.

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CHAPTER 1: PERSPECTIVE

As a child I saw the world from a child's perspective. I looked up to others and thought of them as giants. Eventually I realized we all come in different shapes and sizes. I found myself looking at things differently as I worked to better understand my place in the world. Next, I set out to discover how to use artistic materials to record my journey.

I brought bugs and other creatures home in jars to show my friends how brave I was. One thing that spiked my curiosity was the insects' vulnerability. We are giants in their world, but aren't our numbers a mere fraction of theirs? Isn't it possible for them to overpower us, as in *Invasion of the Ants* on the Sci-Fi channel? My mind ran wild with impossible imagery and fantasy. What if giant insects had weapons and a means of protecting themselves from us? What if we battled these creatures and found out that we couldn't win?

CHAPTER 2: MFA YEARS 1-3

As a self-taught artist, I strived to excel in a family where no one else pursued an art career. Family and friends encouraged me to pursue my passion to create works of art.

Through the beginning stages of my graduate degree program my imagination was rich with imagery of horses, human anatomy, and human tribal fantasy. Animal and human attributes came together. Gestural automatism played a big part in this work, and I employed linear hatching, cross-hatching, and aggressive mark making to convey emotion and movement. Many of the figurative works generated a feeling of movement in static space. Even a figure in a fetal position had a sense of tension and wanted to explode. I conveyed movement through the use of figurative poses that I rendered with spontaneous splashes of paint and ink. The paint and ink went around and across each body, giving it a directional flow in the large composition.



Figure 1 - Leap

My interests changed as I began to identify with the snail. The snail became a symbol for me, a military brat who moved with his family from place to place for 23 years. The snail is comical, and yet it symbolized how I see myself. As a child I played with insects like every other kid in the neighborhood. Some kids stuck them in bottles and gave them a simulated home. I place them inside of bottle rockets, firecrackers, and circles of impenetrable salt. I realized that I was as defenseless as a snail, always accepting my environment and everything that acted upon it. When we were kids we would build forts and protect ourselves from invading forces; though the forts were weak in construction we maintained them. Unlike the snail, however, whose shell (if not eaten or killed) finds itself safe in its mobile fortress. We learn how to defend and protect ourselves on the moves inside military vehicles such as tanks. I was happy to give the snail some advantage over its opposition.



Figure 2 – Bring the Rain



Figure 3 – Bravo Company

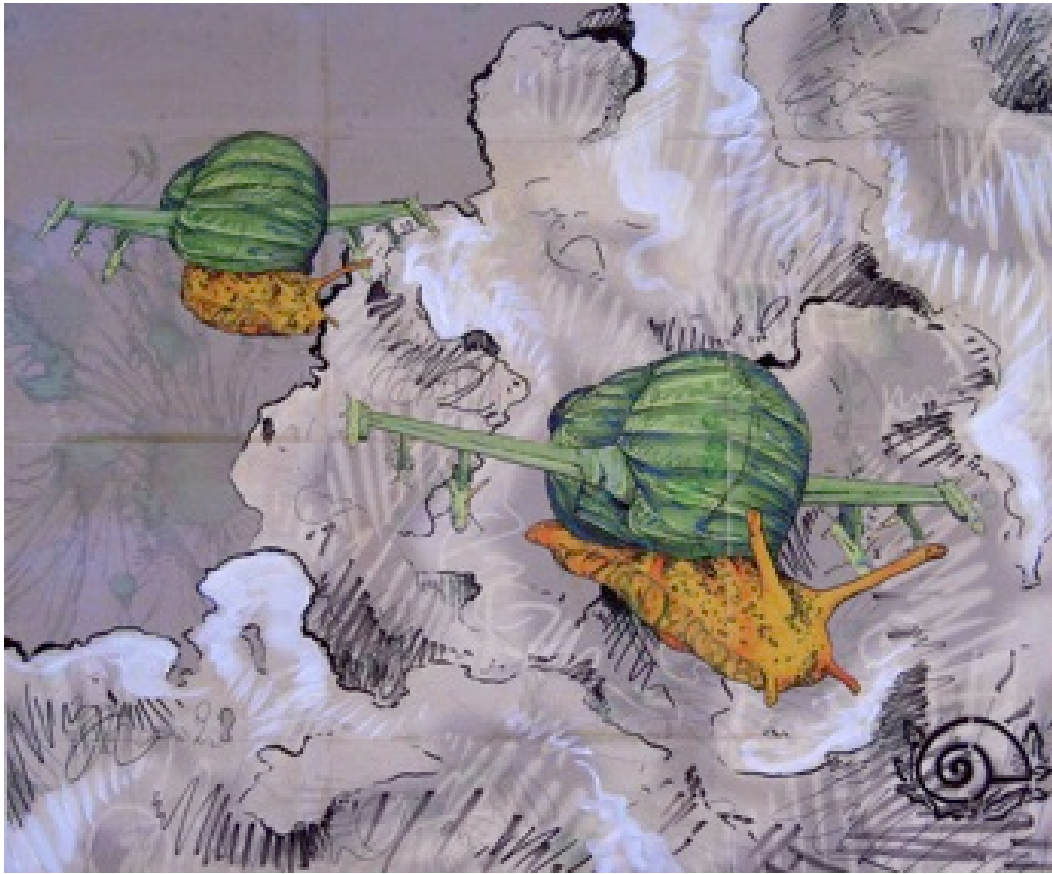


Figure 4 – Above and Beyond

The military housing and nearby government buildings where I grew up always had a distinctive institutional form regardless of the military base we happened to occupy: The same desert tan, the same bricking, and a war memorial lurked around every corner. However, every new military installation provided me with different experiences. Helicopters on training missions hovered over our houses throughout the day, mortar fire and tank barrages could be heard from miles away, and roadside training grounds abounded with fake cities and towns where combat exercises were held. I was raised amid simulated combat exercises from infancy through my high school years. This became normal for me. So, to create scenes of a military nature, albeit with insects, made sense to me.

What exactly is the relationship between the snail image and simulated military combat? I depict the snail in an unexpected situation (combat). And as Rene Magritte might have done, I distort the normal size relationships between the objects and their environment. Unlike the surrealists, I do not use polished rendering to fool the eye; I render forms in an identifiable gestural style to make you believe that they exist as you see them.

“Renee Adams draws inspiration from botanical images by 19th century biologist Ernst Haeckel, Renee Adams constructed her own imaginary hybrid species using polymer clay, glass, wood and acrylic paint.” In my earlier works I brought my snail drawings into the 3-dimensional realm utilizing polymer clay and acrylic in the construction.



Figure 5 – Bring the Rain Sculpture



Figure 6 - Snails

To understand the snail, I owned and cared for a few of my own. I studied at least 25 species ranging from fresh water to salt water and even those who shoot retractable harpoons out of their mouths. I owned Fresh Water Apple Snails (so named due to the sheer size of their shells) among others. I kept them in a fish tank on a regulated diet of fresh plants. Due to their diet they produce vibrant pink eggs in a cluster of several hundred at the time of conception. Fresh Water Apple snails have a set sex, as do many other snails that are hermaphrodites, depending on the population difference. At the end of my study I ate a snail, or escargot as the French call it. Garlic is needed to cover the bottom feeder's gritty taste of dirt and chewy muscle.



Figure 7 – Live Snail #1



Figure 8 – Live Snail #2

Although, I feel comfortable forging smaller art works, larger-scale works convey my idea in an effective way. When the size changed so did my color. As I progressed through my degree program my color palette changed significantly from dull to more expressive and even abstract at times. The greens of a tree cactus were no longer greens but became vibrant, abstract orange forms. From this now arbitrary color sensibility I envisioned how the snail would see things.

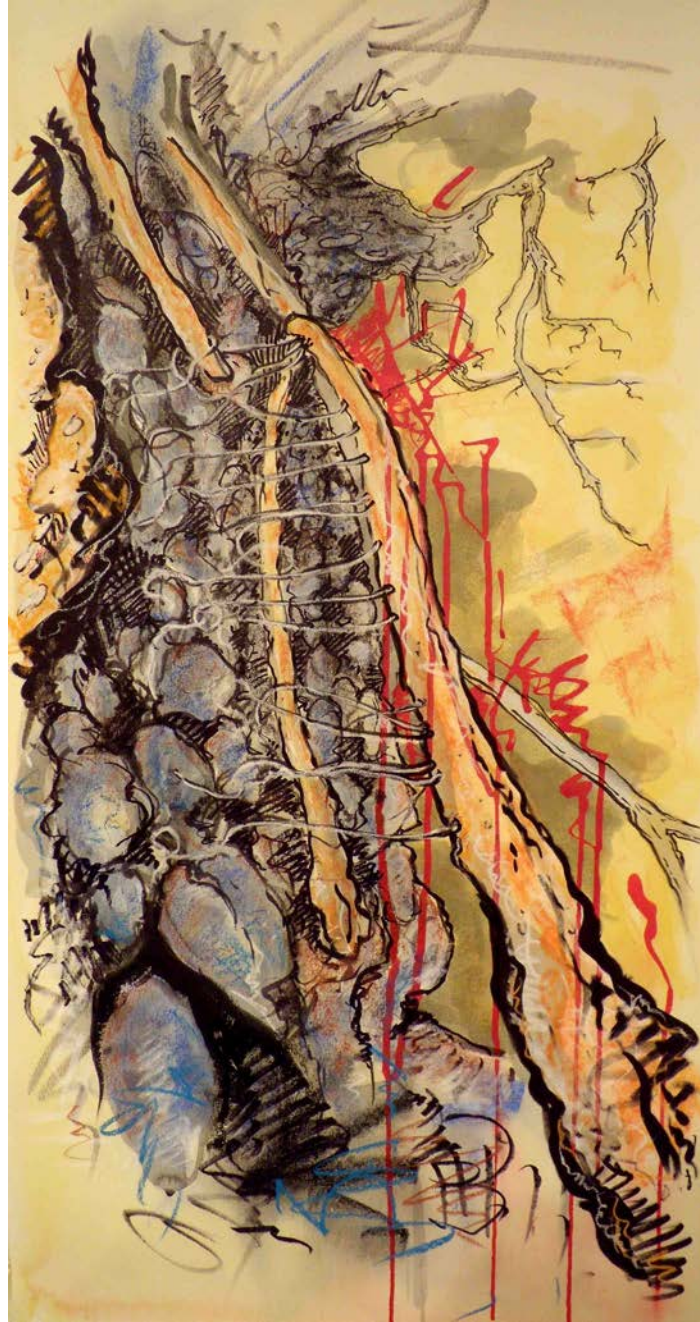


Figure 9 – Envision #1

I depicted explosions in my work, which we would “observe” from a safe distance behind the jungle of grass. Scenes of destruction, like the explosions, represent obstacles that I have overcome or ideas that I must recognize in order to make psychological progress in my life.

Houses represent comfort, where I feel at peace, where my personal belongings surround me. Wherever I go with my things I always feel comfortable in a new place, making it easy for me to adjust, just as the snail takes its shell with it wherever it goes.



Figure 10 – Before the Battle



Figure 11 - Home



Figure 12 - Aftermath

Throughout last semester of 2010 my work has changed significantly from observations of the snail to simply depicting the vantage point of the snail. From this new point of view I want the viewer to feel a sense of immersion in an environment in which the snail is at eye level. Perspective is handled with thick lines up front and thinner lines in the background to establish a subtle sense of depth. As with my art, Kara Walker's goal is to make the viewer gasp and laugh at the same time. "I want to provoke the audience in the most enjoyable way possible," Walker

told Artnews. "I think of my art as a kind of melodrama producing a certain giddiness that entertains but also empowers." (Decker) Lately, I am striving to pull the viewer into my art by making it larger than life. The colors that I employ are not black and white like Walkers', but resemble that which you see on military garb. Colors match those of the military O.D. (olive drab), desert tan, gunmetal grey and dirty browns that vary in intensity. O.D. is associated with military toys, such as little army men that children still play with today. Now memories and color association reinforce the military theme of my background so that the snail can now be implied in my pictures without being shown.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

Snails carry their homes on their backs. In this accumulated body of work I have attempted to show the similarities between the life of a snail and that of a “military brat”.

I have strived to give the viewer a snail’s perspective; to see the world from their point of view. I would like the viewer to experience the drab and mundane color of the military palette. Perhaps the experience will encourage the viewer to recall his or her own childhood experiences.

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