University of North Carolina Asheville
Journal of Undergraduate Research
Asheville, North Carolina
May 2019

Mythic Images: Revitalizing Mythology with Neobaroque Narrative Drawing and Painting

Jason Rafferty
Department of Art and Art History
The University of North Carolina Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculy Advisors: Suzanne Dittenber, Robert Dunning, Jackson Martin, Eric Tomberlin, Brent Skidmore

Abstract

The blend of realism and theatricality found in 17th century baroque painting can be reapplied to the creation of contemporary narrative drawings and paintings. Originating from an in-depth study of figure drawing and the baroque paintings of Peter Paul Rubens in Paris, this project reimagines gods and goddesses from ancient Greek and Egyptian mythology in a style that draws upon historical baroque and contemporary figurative artmaking practices, resulting in a fusion which can be characterized as neobaroque. Research conducted on various contemporary figurative painters reveals an evolving, eclectic movement of artists who present fresh takes on painting rooted in history, particularly the historical baroque. These artists are compared with their historical predecessors to reveal ways that they draw from and elaborate upon them, bringing a baroque-infused painterly language to the present. The *Mythic Images* exhibit uses such a language to revitalize figures from archaic myth, paralleling the representations of mythology in baroque painting while integrating them with contemporary concerns. The interest in mythology is informed by James Hillman's Archetypal Psychology, in which mythic entities are conceived of as metaphors personifying various states of the human psyche. As a reflection of this variety, the drawings and paintings in this series portray a spectrum of emotions, color schemes, and subthemes; this emphasis on variety honors the boisterous nature of the polytheistic world of ancient mythology, which runs counter to our contemporary monotheist biases towards unity. The works in this exhibit invite the viewer to question the dividing lines between mythology and reality, history and the present.

1. Introduction

"We are very far from having finished completely with the Middle Ages, classical antiquity, and primitivity, as our modern psyches pretend... It is precisely the loss of connection with the past, our uprootedness, which has given rise to the 'discontents' of civilization."[1]
- C.G. Jung

Mythic Images is a series of drawings and oil paintings in which I reimagine friends, family and acquaintances as mythic gods and goddesses from ancient Greece and Egypt. Through this process, personal and ephemeral figures are linked with collective and enduring ones. The series imitates an eclectic array of historic mythological painting styles, culminating in a number of works that place gods and goddesses within contemporary scenarios. Though various historic styles are examined, there is a particular emphasis on exploring the language of 17th century baroque painting as a means of developing a unique 21st century neobaroque pictorial language. Parallels can readily be drawn between historical baroque paintings and contemporary narrative figurative paintings, which can be characterized as neobaroque.

Of what use is an examination of archaic myths through imitation of dated styles of painting in 21st century North America? This project is pursued in the spirit of seeking "something new by rummaging around in the past," to quote

the psychologist James Hillman, who worked in a similar mindset.[2] Through iterations of 30+ drawings and oil paintings over two years, an inquiry begun as a historicizing excursion into imitation of 17th-19th century painting styles gradually evolved into a body of work that more cohesively integrated the past with the present. The result, particularly with the most recent works, is a unique fusion: **contemporary mythological paintings.** It is my hope that by sifting through styles and stories of our ancestors, culling what is, to my subjective taste, the most interesting and relevant, and seeking to revitalize them through drawing and painting, the myths may be reinterpreted, contemporary connections made evident, and new fodder for imagination discovered.

2. What is Neobaroque?

"We have reached a point at which the old and new coexist." - Angela Ndalianis[3]

What is neobaroque, and first, what is meant by the term baroque? The word is itself large, voluminous even, evoking a complex time period corresponding roughly to 17th century Europe and its overseas colonies. In European painting, it was the period of such varied artists as Caravaggio, Rubens, Poussin, Rembrandt and Vermeer. In discussing baroque precedent, the first three of the aforementioned painters, residents of Catholic countries, will be the focus; as the counter-reformation Catholic Church was the principal patron of the bombastic, ornate style that is synonymous with the term baroque.

The neobaroque, similar to other 'neo' aesthetic movements such as neoclassicism, implies reappraisal of a style and subject matter that has been left fallow or neglected for some time, often hundreds of years. Beyond early use of the term in describing a baroque-revival architectural movement at the turn of the twentieth century, the term neobaroque gained currency in art criticism in the 1980's, 90's and early 2000's, continuing today, to describe an observable international tendency exhibited in the works of some contemporary artists.[4] The neobaroque's precise relation to the historical baroque has been the subject of critical debate; for this paper's purposes it will be described in two modes: baroque revival and transhistorical.[5] "Baroque revival" art explicitly references artworks from the 17th-18th century European baroque period, often reproducing them in parody or making substantial changes to recontextualize the historical baroque work being referenced.[6] In contrast, transhistorical neobaroque art exhibits emotional and formal qualities typically associated with baroque art—such as theatricality, dynamism, vivid color and dramatic lighting, yet does not explicitly reference artwork from the historical baroque period. In addition it may bring these baroque qualities into entirely new media or fusions of styles which did not exist in the historical period. In both of these modes neobaroque art creates a "projection of revived and reworked baroque habits of mind onto a modern world," in the words of the scholar Roland Greene.[7]

The body of work in *Mythic Images* lies somewhere between these two modes. Many of the compositional motifs reference historical baroque artworks, but recast the figures in contemporary-world settings. Some of the works, like *The Furies* and *Conflict of Generations*, allude to issues such as natural disasters exacerbated by climate change, which were certainly not part of the conversation in the historical baroque period. Others, like *Her Judgement of Paris*, take a rather problematic mythological narrative (from the standpoint of gender power dynamics) treated in the baroque era and modify the script from a lens of women's empowerment. The latest works in the series, particularly *Persephone and Hermes in the Underworld*, combine narrative themes gleaned from baroque mythological painting; contemporary-clothed figures playing gods and goddesses; digital photomontage translated into oil paint, and elements of abstraction layered upon perspectival spaces. The works in this series explore "a new kind of new... [that] incorporate[s] or reflect[s] upon the past.. folding the past into the present", as the scholar Kelly Wacker describes.[8]

3. Elements of Neobaroque Style in Contemporary Narrative Painting

There has been some recent discussion of neobaroque in contemporary figurative painting, such as the essays appearing in Kelly Wacker's *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art.* Michelle Lang examines Lucian Freud in relation to Rubens and Rembrandt, and Catherine Wilcox-Titus examines "Neo-Baroque Spectacle and the Female Body" in works by Jenny Saville, Lisa Yuskavage and John Currin.[9] The artists who were primary influencers on the *Mythic Images* series are less household-names in the art world than those artists, and to my knowledge have not been written about previously in the context of the neobaroque. Furthermore, the emphasis here will be placed upon neobaroque *narrative* painters. It is debatable to what extent the aforementioned artists are interested in narrative storytelling, as opposed to other concerns in figurative painting, and that is outside the scope of this paper. The aim

here is to expand the purview of the neobaroque discussion into the (relatively small and marginal) world of contemporary narrative painting in order to contextualize the work in the *Mythic Images* series.[10]

Some parameters must be set regarding the primary elements of neobaroque style in contemporary narrative painting before specific artists can be discussed. It is worth noting that the term "narrative painting" comes from the premodern era when painting was a tool employed by the powerful to convey easily-comprehensible narratives, such as biblical stories and commemorations of battles and political events, to the audience; whereas in our time the meaning of the term is quite different. Painting is no longer relied upon as a journalistic and propagandistic tool of kings, and the Catholic Church is no longer commissioning scores of paintings as their power has waned in Europe. Storytelling in paint has followed a similar trajectory of deconstruction and stylistic experimentation which narration in literature underwent in the twentieth century.[11]

Thus, contemporary narrative painters create paintings which narrate their own fictive stories. They think of storytelling in a manner similar to the Surrealists, the Symbolists, the Beats and James Joyce, to name a few examples. That is to say the narratives are, more often than not, nonlinear. The "story" is often highly personal, symbolic, surreal, dream-like, enigmatic, and / or numinous, hence it is often deliberately obscure, inviting the viewer's participation in creating meaning. Characters or models are often taken from the artist's life and transmuted into painted personages. The model or figure as subject is the first of several definitive elements of neobaroque contemporary narrative painting:

1. **Subject**: Figurative art is the primary interest of neobaroque narrative painting. Often figures are archetypal or mythological, drawing upon the rich revival of mythological painting which took place in the baroque era. The figure models are often identifiable as the artist themself or people from the artist's life, blurring the line between reality and fiction.
2. **Emotion**: A heightened sense of drama and emotional effect is emphasized in a theatrical manner.
3. **Form**: There is a deliberately-posed, staged or mannered quality which may be overt or quite subtle. A complexity or crowding of form fills the pictorial space.
4. **History**: There is a strong emphasis on historical rootedness emphasized by eclectic borrowings from prior masters which may or may not be obvious or easily identifiable. Anachronism is deliberately used to blend different time periods.
5. **Craft**: There is a strong emphasis on the value of craftsmanship and technical mastery, particularly related to 17th-century values of craftsmanship. Skill in representational drawing and oil painting (particularly of the human figure) and preparation of materials such as paint surfaces, mediums and paints, (most often oil paints) is prized.
6. **Avant-garde Strategies:**[12] Personal, subjective or obscure symbolism is often used. Ambiguous, surreal narratives invite the viewer's participation in creating meaning. There are deliberate distortions of form and/or pictorial space. Expressionistic color, as opposed to realistic color, is frequently used either overtly or subtly. Emphasis on the texture of the paint surface, characteristic of abstract art, may distort the painting's illusion of space and add expressive interest.

Overall, the intention of neobaroque narrative painting is to create a dream-like, theatrical pictorial environment. It does so using representational forms to convey poetic meanings via a baroque-infused aesthetic which is nonetheless unmistakably contemporary.

4. Influences: Contemporary Narrative Painting and Baroque Precedent

The artists Caravaggio, Poussin and Rubens were previously mentioned as subjects of focus for exploring baroque precedent. Now that the stylistic elements of neobaroque painting have been laid out, some examples of contemporary narrative painters who are borrowing from and elaborating upon these baroque predecessors can be examined.

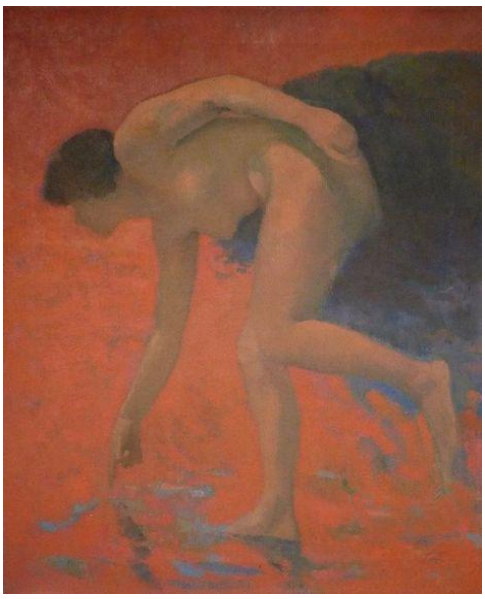
Caravaggio's heightened proto-cinematic realism[13] and dramatic use of light to emphasize narrative can be seen reflected in the paintings of Adam Miller, who adds into the mix a playful mannerism of human form. Miller's use of contemporary-costumed individuals representing mythic and allegorical figures are reminiscent of Caravaggio's unidealized peasants and prostitutes representing sacred figures in his Catholic devotional paintings. Likewise the heightened scale of Caravaggio's epic altarpieces is reflected in the ambitions of Miller, who prefers to work on canvases sized ten feet or larger.[14] A characteristic example is Miller's *Twilight in Arcadia*, completed in 2013. In this piece the artist recasts archetypal mythic hunters and satyrs into a modern allegory about the dominant values of

progress and industrial development in American society. The hunters (who are modeled by Miller's artist friends) brandish scoped rifles menacingly at the satyrs, who seem to symbolize innocent creativity and the natural world. The clothing and anatomy are rigorously rendered as in a Caravaggio, but Miller subtly distorts proportions and poses figures in a highly artificial, choreographed manner that is an evident, intentional parody of mannerist and baroque figural language. Like in a Caravaggio, the figures are posed dramatically in mid-action - but in Miller, the action is exaggeratedly staged and grandiose. Miller also eschews Caravaggio's shadowy pictorial space in this piece, instead balancing the gruesome hunting narrative with a pastel, storybook type palette and pastoral setting more reminiscent of Tiepolo.

Figure 1. *Twilight in Arcadia,* Adam Miller, 2013.
https://www.juxtapoz.com/images/alex%20nicholson/0000/2016/Aug-Sep/Adam_Miller/JuxtapozAdamMiller08.jpg

Figure 2. *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, Caravaggio, 1599-1600. https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039614343.

Poussin, on the other end of the realism spectrum from Caravaggio and Miller, hardly ever worked from live models, preferring to create miniature wax figures, light them, and compose a scene from imagination.[15] He utilized character types based on ancient Roman busts, which were being excavated en masse in his time period in his adopted city of Rome. Lennart Anderson, an influential if underappreciated painter who passed away in 2015 at age 87, is an example of a contemporary "Poussiniste", to re-apply a historical term used for devotees of Poussin's work in 18th century France. Most evident in his large scale figurative paintings called the *Idylls*, Anderson sets figures in arcadian scenes highly reminiscent of those which Poussin favored in his imagined world. "The idyll should never go out of fashion," Anderson said in an interview with *Newsweek*, "the further we are from an Arcadian scene, the more meaningful it is and we should find ways to paint it. Besides, the subject is not just classical. It is air, flesh and sky, and all the great art of the past which had those things in it."[16] In lieu of updating the arcadian motif with contemporary costume or rigorous realism as with Miller, Anderson paints classicized nudes with a vibrant, sensitive palette with evident ties to post-impressionist painting or even color field abstraction. Though these later works of his "slip effortlessly into the stream of painting [history]"[17], to quote one reviewer of his work, there is a diffuse vagueness of detail which would not be permissible in the pre-abstract, pre-Cezanne world of the historical baroque period.[18] In fact one can associate Anderson's *Idylls* quite closely with Cezanne's *Bathers* or Matisse's *The Dance*, where faces are left unrendered, inviting the viewer to fill in the details.

Figures 3, 4. *Idyll III* and *Nude*, Lennart Anderson, 1979-2011.
https://www.painters-table.com/sites/default/files/images/link-posts/inset/anderson2_0.jpg
http://images.huffingtonpost.com/2014-05-29-graphic5.jpg

Figure 5. *Triumph of Flora*, Nicolas Poussin, 1627.
https://library.artstor.org/asset/LESSING_ART_10310119573.

Figure 6. *Bathers,* Paul Cezanne, c. 1890.
https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARMNIG_10313261314.

Striking a balance between Caravaggio's and Adam Miller's choreographed realism and Poussin's and Lennart Anderson's imagination-suffused idealism is a painter whose style sits between the two ends of the spectrum, Peter Paul Rubens. Rubens is acclaimed by some painters today and yet dismissed or even resented by many others. "While many people acknowledge Rubens' importance, fewer say unreservedly that they 'love his work', Susan Lawson writes in her eponymous book on the painter.[19] Concerning his aesthetic language, Lawson notes that "Rubens was not quite a *classical* Classicist, nor was he quite a Realist - he eschews the external mimesis of Caravaggio, for example… For Rubens... the human form is both individual and real *and* symbolic and eternal."[20] In another essay, the art historian Stefan Weppelmann writes of "...the atmosphere… and turmoil that makes the works of the Flemish artist appear so distinct… dynamic - not realistic, mind you."[21] His is not the idealizing, forthrightly romanesque classicism of Poussin, who definitively *is* such a capital "C" Classicist. And while Rubens was highly influenced by Caravaggio's heightened realism and chiaroscuro as a young painter studying in Rome at the height of the latter's favor and popularity in that city, his own style evolved to be a carefully balanced Aristotelian "middle path" between realism and idealism, observation and imagination.

Figure 7. (Detail) *Feast of Venus,* Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1635-40.
https://library.artstor.org/asset/LESSING_ART_10310119922.

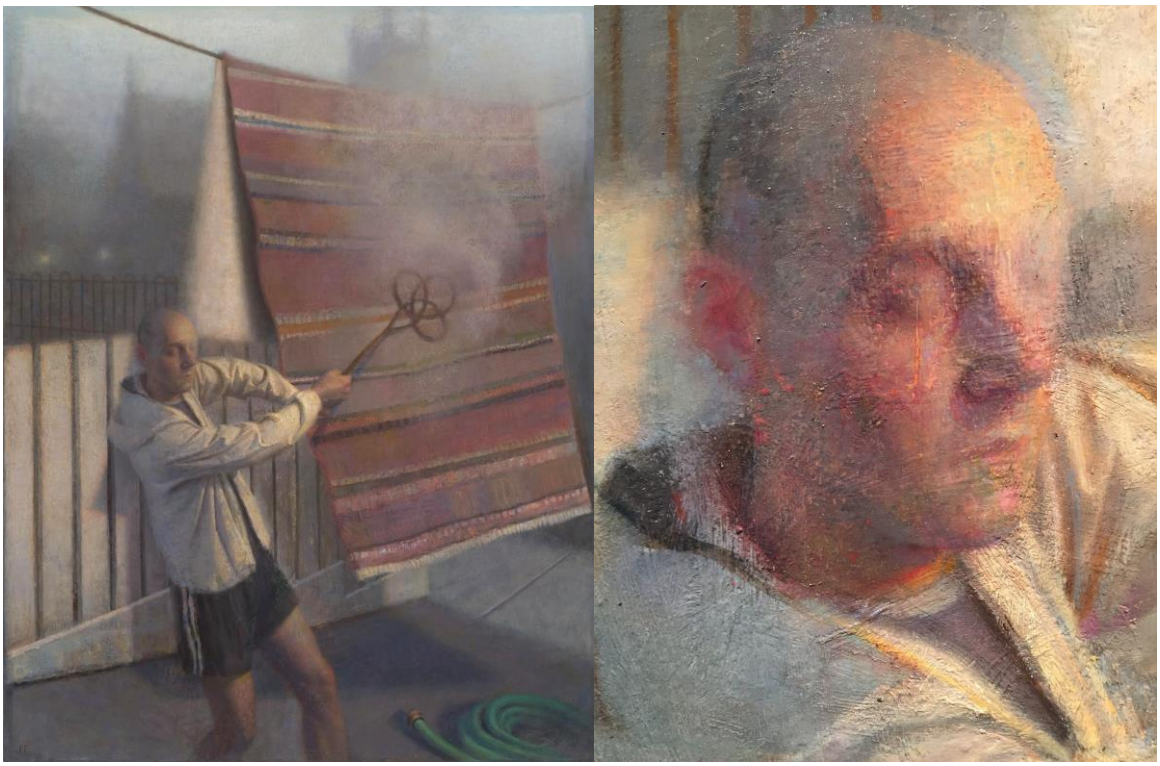
Margaret Bowland is one contemporary narrative painter who cites Rubens strongly as an influence; she lists monographs on the artist and his famed student Van Dyck first and second atop a "stack of art books always by [her] chair."[22] Their influence is evident in the luminous, layered treatment of flesh and fabric in her *Olympia Series 7* (2007). Her works certainly fit the criteria laid out in the elements of neobaroque painting. In the painting *Babes in the Woods,* (2013) she places two little girls dressed as ballerinas in a foreboding, surreal space that seems to envelope them in a melting, opaque goo colored black like oil in some places and light pink and blue like cotton candy in others. The story is ambiguous, as the two girls, half lit and half in shadow, peer out to the viewer with unsettling gazes of curiosity tinged with fear. The girls, who are daughters of her friends, are, in the painting, characters that represent archetypal children - They are not named, they are simply *Babes,* representing the vulnerable child who we all once were and still have within us. The works are at once strikingly contemporary and yet are deeply referential to history. Bowland's interest in Van Dyck is evident in the refinement of the girls' portraits, who confront the viewer face on with a frank humanity as do the best works of Van Dyck, such as the *Portrait of Cornelis van der Geest.* Bowland's interest in elaborate costuming and makeup, including powdering her models' faces white and even dressing some in Rococo wigs such as in *Party, Chelsea Gallery,* (2009), further allude to historical baroque fashions but have explicitly contemporary implications: all of her whiteface models are black, and hence address contemporary issues of race and racism. This is precisely what is meant by the "discovery of the modernity of the baroque as a transhistorical phenomenon" alluded to in the scholar Monika Kaup's description of the neobaroque.[23]

Figure 8. (Detail) *Two Ladies-in-Waiting to Queen Henrietta Maria*, Anthony van Dyck, 1638. https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_10313879232.

Figure 9. *Party, Chelsea Gallery*, Margaret Bowland, 2009. http://www.margaretbowland.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1019401-780x1030.jpg

There are other important contemporary narrative painters who factor in as significant influences to this series. The painter Paul Fenniak's layered, textural treatment of paint recalls the process of Rembrandt's late paintings, and is

utilized to elaborate scenes of poignant dreamlike surreality. Like Rembrandt in his day, Fenniak has a flare for the dramatic in light effect and staging, but in lieu of Rembrandt's biblical narratives, the viewer is presented with contemporary narrative scenes of near impenetrable mystery. Fenniak's figures and scenarios may at a passing glance seem mundane, such as a man beating dust off of his carpet on an urban rooftop in *Unsettled Dust* (2015), but the more one sits with the image, the stranger, more emotionally unsettling and beautiful it becomes.



Figures 10, 11. *Unsettled Dust,* Paul Fenniak, 2015.
https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.collageplatform.com.prod/image_cache/2020x1160_fit/5c48b19da5aa2c830c8b4567/98557a6f766a6a2514d62a513c051788.jpeg

Scott Noel similarly utilizes seemingly mundane figures in contemporary settings and dress to convey strange, dream-like narratives and allusions to mythology. In *Orpheus and Eurydice* (2008), a fairly ordinary still life occupies the foreground, with a mirror placed on the table that reveals a likeness of the painter, standing shirtless behind the easel. Behind him stands a woman observing casually from a doorway, and a painting-within-the-painting, another of his works which has two more figures within it. "In what way does this everyday studio scene correspond with the *Orpheus* myth?" the viewer is left wondering. As the art historian Robert R. Shane describes in an article discussing contemporary narrative painting, "rather than illustrating a pre-existing narrative with readily understood imagery, new history painters… suggest a narrative, but, as in a dream, a linear plot never takes form, and their symbols are understood by only the dreamer—if even he or she can interpret them."[24]

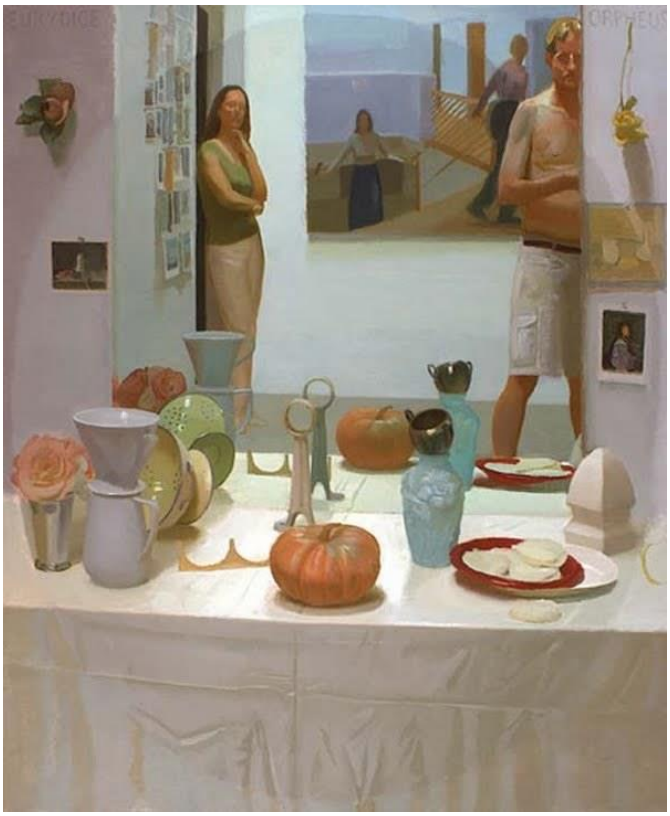


Figure 12. *Orpheus and Eurydice,* Scott Noel, 2008.
http://www.grossmccleaf.com/artistpages/noel44p.html

5. Neobaroque and Mythology in the *Mythic Images* Series

My fascination with baroque figurative painting began when I first was a student with Studio Escalier, in Paris in 2012. In addition to drawing the figure from life, we had the opportunity to study in the Louvre for some three months. I was magnetically drawn to the room with Rubens's *Marie de' Medici Cycle.* There I spent many afternoons and late evenings making conceptual drawing studies to understand how Rubens composed the space and movement of countless figures in the operatic series of paintings. I concentrated on one of the 24 huge canvases, *The Felicity of the Regency.* In particular, the blending of mythic gods and goddesses from ancient Greece with contemporaneous historical figures - those of Marie de' Medici and her family along with their court - made a lasting impression. So did the poses, which appeared choreographed perfectly as in a dance production - one figure would begin a turning motion and the next two would complete it. I became impassioned with Rubens's work, later visiting his reconstructed home and studio in Antwerp in 2014. I continued to draw many studies after his work along with other old masters, and to draw and paint the figure from life while studying with Studio Escalier. Gradually I discovered contemporary painters exploring similar paths, both peers and those further along.

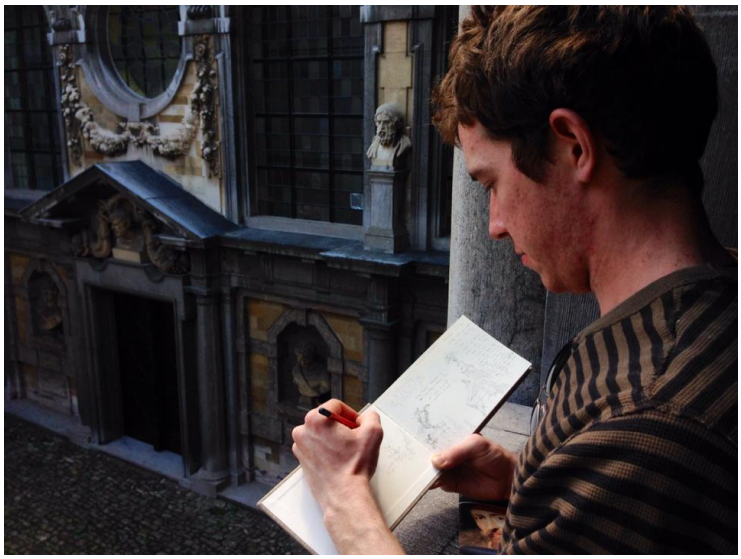


Figure 13. Drawing at the Rubens house in Antwerp, Belgium, 2014.

An example of a contemporary thinker reviving mythological material whose work has had a decisive impact upon my series is James Hillman. Hillman branched off from his mentor Carl Jung in creating Archetypal psychology, a unique branch of the field in which mythic gods and goddesses, particularly those of ancient Greece, are utilized as metaphors to personify various states of the psyche. "Gods, for psychology, are neither believed in nor addressed directly. They are rather adjectival than substantive."[25] Hillman also brings an erudite passion for seeking out fresh insights through the study of archaic subject matter, stating "nowadays, one is more likely to find something new by rummaging around in the past."[26] The prominent scholar of mythology Joseph Campbell reinforces the need to continually recontextualize ancient mythology, writing,

> A mythological pantheon is fluid and as the needs and the realizations of society change, so do relationships to the gods. Deities are really time- and space-conditioned; they are shaped from inherited ideas, inherited traditional imageries, but they are put together in terms of a local context of time and space.[27]

Beginning with the first criteria of neobaroque style, that of subject, all of the paintings in this series have mythological figures as primary subjects. Most are modeled by friends and acquaintances, with some borrowed from art history, such as a number of the drunken revelers in *Theater of the Absurd.* Heightened emotionality, drama and theatrical effect is a large part of the series. The paintings are designed to elicit a range of different emotional reactions - they are cheeky at times and melodramatic at others. Some works are crowded with figures who dance and drink, while others confront the viewer with seriousness and solemnity. Going along with the theme of these narratives being metaphors to personify various states of the psyche, "The [psychic] underworld is an innumerable community of figures. The endless variety of figures reflects the endlessness of the soul."[28]

Other neobaroque elements will be discussed as particular pieces are examined, but the last overarching quality to note is that of the importance of craft and technique. Building upon my apprenticeship and shared studio with the painter John Mac Kah, I have studied and utilized for this series a variety of means of preparing panels for oil painting. Some works for this series are painted on masonite panels prepared with traditional chalk gesso ground and linen-mounted birch panels primed with lead-titanium oil ground. These surfaces are modern adaptations of traditional paint surfaces frequently used in the seventeenth century.[29] This is not for a purpose of historical reenactment so much as for their great effectiveness as a stable, durable paint surface, and for the economy of preparing one's own panels. To these traditional preparations I have added the emerging contemporary practice of painting on aluminum polyethylene 'dibond' panels primed with two grades of acrylic gesso.[30] This surface for panel painting is highly durable and quite affordable, and is in line with the tradition of working on panel - even at a larger format - which Rubens in particular employed frequently.[31] This is a major reason why his works have held up exceptionally well over four hundred years, whereas many later works on stretched canvas from the 19th century have degraded considerably.[32]

From the standpoint of drawing and painting technique, I gravitate toward the synthesis of realism and idealism mentioned in the prior discussion of Rubens's technique, and aspire to the *'sprezzatura'* looseness paired with precision evident in many baroque drawings and paintings.

Figure 14. Preparation of panels with chalk gesso.

Figure 15. *Theater of the Absurd*, Jason Rafferty, 2016-8.

The painting *Theater of the Absurd* fits well with Roland Greene's idea of the neobaroque as a "parody of the baroque."[33] The drunken bacchanal was a favored subject of secular baroque painting, and this painting transports the revelers to a setting reminiscent of a 1930's speakeasy. A jester playing the role of the Greek Trickster god Hermes sits at a poker table accompanied by an array of questionable characters. The floor is littered with dollar bills, discarded refuse (a mask, broken hand mirror, wine glass and bottle), and a chubby blonde baby who seems to be neglected. The tiles are warped as if seen through a funhouse mirror. The drunken god Silenus, chubby aged mentor of Bacchus, is seen in two states - triumphant on the left, hoisted by a precarious tower of supporters, and sloshed on the right, getting

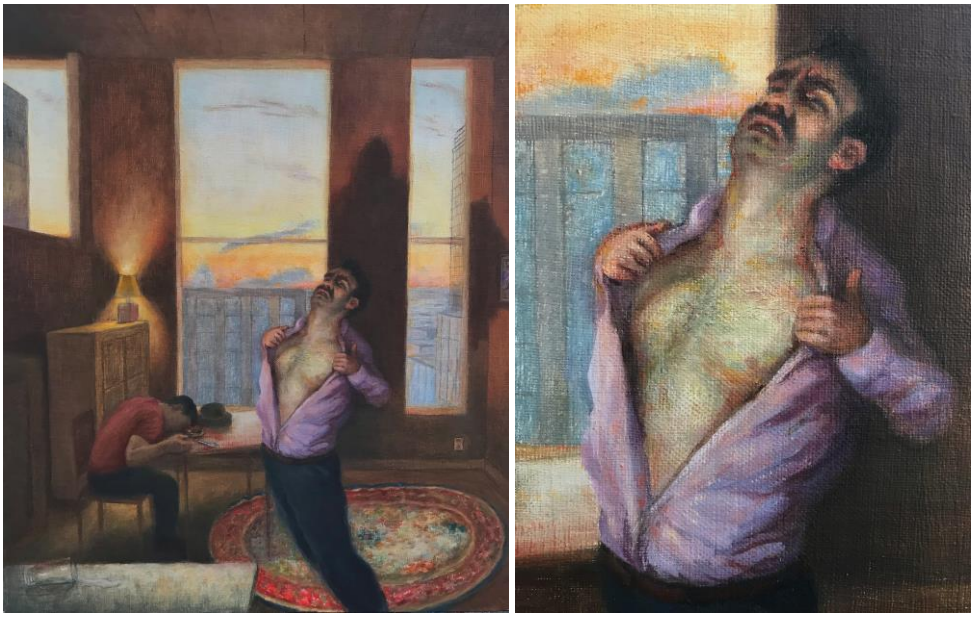
escorted out of the venue along with his yellow-skinned crony by a man in gray robes. The piece plays heavily with anachronisms, blending costumes and figure motifs from the ancient world, 17th-20th centuries, and was first composed in drawing form shortly after November 2016 as a mythic allegory of contemporary political chaos.[34]

The Furies I, *II* and *III* depict the ancient Greek Furies or Erinyes, who were feared as vengeful goddesses of destruction and later converted to deities of protection. In my paintings they are paired with the terrifying storms exacerbated by climate change which are similarly subjects of contemporary anxiety, destruction and hopes for protection. *The Furies I* portrays a wildfire overtaking a vineyard, as took place in Napa and Sonoma counties in California in 2017. *The Furie*s *II* and *III* depict the winds and waters that ravaged Puerto Rico during Hurricane Maria that same year. Like *Theater of the Absurd*, the works pair my ongoing mythology research with events from contemporary headlines that resonate with a strong personal emotional impact, as I am engaged in following politics and have participated in environmental activism. In pairing the events with myth I hope to elevate them beyond passing news headlines and into a more transcendent human dialogue. The figures in *The Furies* are posed in a deliberately artificial and mannered style. The arched torso in *The Furies III* resembles a Rubens painting of Christ - he took it from ancient Roman statue fragments. The pictorial space is filled with the figures most prominently, but also swirling waves, hair, fabric, storm clouds, broken power lines, fallen trees and other refuse swaying around in baroque spiral movements. Adam Miller also often uses similar underlying spiral patterns, gleaned from Rubens, to compose his figures and settings.[35] Finally, two of the *Furies* are portrayed as men, as I thought the ancient deities of destruction being portrayed solely as women a bit unfair, and frankly, unrealistic. I also wish for these works to lean into the later meaning of the Furies - that of protectors or stillnesses within the chaos, which impacted the choice to have them floating, and composed like ballet dancers.

Figures 16, 17. *The Furies II & III: Hurricane Maria*, Jason Rafferty, 2018.

Figures 18, 19, 20. Ancient marble torso fragment; (detail) *Saint Augustine Between Christ and the Virgin*, Rubens (images flipped on horiz. axis)[36]*;* (detail) *The Furies III: Hurricane Maria*, Jason Rafferty.

The Death of Castor depicts Pollux lamenting the death of his brother Castor, who is a mortal. Inspired by Scott Noel's anachronistic portrayal of people in everyday contemporary dress as mythological figures, the deities are placed in a modern urban apartment in what appears to be a murder scene. Castor's body is face-down on the table, where it looks as if he was in the midst of eating a meal. His fedora hat and discarded fork frame pools of blood. In the lower foreground, a glass of water lies spilled on the countertop. Pollux has just walked in, and having discovered the brutal scene, tears his shirt open in lament. His distress is emphasized by the green-gray-yellow hue of his flesh tone, the palette of hot reds, yellows and violets in the room, and the monstrous shadow he casts on the wall. Baroque art never shied away from melodramatic portrayal of violence and grief, and this aspect of life is acknowledged in this painting. Soon after finishing this painting I was introduced to the works of Paul Fenniak, whose similarly unnerving, phantasmagoric paintings of figures in contemporary dress have encouraged me to continue exploring this style.[37]



Figures 20, 21. *The Death of Castor*, Jason Rafferty, 2018.

Figures 22, 23, 24. *Her Judgement of Paris*, Jason Rafferty, 2019.

Her Judgement of Paris is one of the most recent paintings in the *Mythic Images* series, and serves as fitting last piece to discuss. From a technical perspective, the painting picks up where *The Death of Castor* left off, integrating more expressionistic experimentation with fleshtones and textures inspired by Paul Fenniak and other contemporary narrative painters. Artificial colored lighting from multiple sources, along with shadowy areas that fade into pure linear form, create the effect of a surreal dream. The Judgement of Paris is a Greek myth in which the Trojan mortal Paris is tasked with choosing which of the goddesses is the most beautiful: Hera, Athena, or Aphrodite. A golden apple inscribed "to the fairest" would be given as a prize to the victor. In classical depictions of the myth from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, Paris is depicted intently gazing at the three goddesses, who have stripped nude in efforts to sway his judgement while each attempts to bribe him. The viewer assumes a voyeuristic role. From a contemporary lens of women's empowerment, this sort of story is problematic to say the least. For my portrayal, I collaborated with my girlfriend, the artist Sally Garner, to enact a different spin on the story. The role of judge is shifted from Paris to Aphrodite (Venus in Roman mythology), who firmly steps upon the golden apple. Adorned with jewelry, wearing a vibrant dress and colorful makeup, surrounded by silk and fur, she maintains baroque sensuality, but is in control. In this composition the male figure is conversely duplicated and made anonymous, with half of the head left invisible. Venus sits enthroned, assuming a stance of power with an intent gaze out to the viewer. Like Manet's *Olympia*, she confronts the viewer directly. She does not acknowledge the men who fruitlessly, as it were, offer her apples.

6. Conclusion

The *Mythic Images* series has provided me an opportunity for immense artistic growth condensed into a short, intensive period of time. Its eclecticism is a result of my interest in integrating a broad variety of influences to form a unique personal style infused with baroque and contemporary neobaroque figurative practices. Through the process of creating this body of work and responding to critical feedback, a trajectory of stylistic and conceptual evolution can be traced. The series started out with more literal interpretations of the expectations of mythological painting, based heavily upon the tradition of the genre. Historicizing painting styles were utilized and the mythic entities were largely represented by nude figures in landscapes, or figures wearing timeless clothing accompanied by draperies. Smaller-format, single figure compositions predominated in the earlier work. As the body of work progressed, more complicated and larger format paintings were created, and the portrayal of mythology became less standardized and historicizing. Links to the contemporary world were formed in works exploring a mythic take on phenomena such as climate change, generational strife and sociopolitical upheaval; these themes are timely, yet also contain a certain archetypal, repeating resonance which lend well to a mythic treatment. Narratives became more complex, frequently integrating multiple figures interacting with each other and placed in an elaborated environment. Contemporary environments and clothing were utilized rather than avoided. The painting style remained fairly consistent, attempting a careful balancing act of realism and idealism, but further into the series, impasto effects and textural abstracted passages began to be explored in order to enhance the emotional effect of the pictures. Toward the conclusion of the series, I rediscovered my long-dormant passion for digital painting and photo manipulation in Photoshop, which I used to compose the final few works in the series. They are carefully-rendered 'analogue' paintings based upon digital photomontage compositions. Integrating this method with an interest in narrative painting, paired with the beguiling depth of mythological subject matter promises interesting avenues for future work.

7. Acknowledgements

I wish to extend my thanks to my faculty advisors Suzie Dittenber, Robert Dunning, Jackson Martin, Eric Tomberlin and Brent Skidmore, as well as to the faculty members Rob Anderson and Tamie Beldue for their feedback and suggestions. Jordan Krutsch, Jackson Martin and Rob Anderson provided crucial help with woodworking assembly related to panels and canvas stretchers. I also wish to thank the Undergraduate Research program at UNCA for providing a summer research grant that was immensely helpful, and especially Mila Lemaster, program coordinator for Undergraduate Research, for her assistance over many email exchanges during my grant period. I must also mention Timothy Stotz, Michelle Tully and Tobias Hall of Studio Escalier, who gave me a conceptual system of

figurative drawing and painting along with hundreds of hours of figure drawing and painting practice from 2012-2015 without which these works would not be possible. Tim in particular was an important guide as I studied Rubens's work in the Louvre in 2012. Also, my colleague John Mac Kah, with whom I apprenticed in Asheville beginning in 2012 and who taught me how to prepare panels and mediums like the old masters, how to paint indirectly using traditional techniques, and generally emphasizing the importance of knowing one's craft. Any painting in this series which contains landscape elements was possible because I studied with John, a superb landscape painter and a sort of artistic 'second father' in whose studio I continue to work. My dear friend and art client Gary M. Jay provided invaluable financial support that assisted in the purchasing of frames and supplies, and his camaraderie helped me through some challenging periods. Finally, I wish to thank my family, friends and girlfriend, Sally Garner (UNCA BFA 2013), for their listening, suggestions, guidance, love, and overall emotional support.

8. Bibliography:

1. "Adam Miller: A Painter of Contemporary Epics." Juxtapoz Art & Culture. September 27, 2016. Accessed December 06, 2018. https://www.juxtapoz.com/news/magazine/adam-miller-a-painter-of-contemporary-epics/.
2. Anderson, Lennart, *Idyll III*. 1979-2011. Source: Brian Schumacher and A'Dora Philips, "Lennart Anderson (1928-2015)", Painter's Table. 2015, Digital Image: https://www.painters-table.com/sites/default/files/images/link-posts/inset/anderson2_0.jpg.
3. Anderson, Lennart. *Nude*. c. 2010-14. Source: Daniel Maidman, "Lennart Anderson: The Road to Arcadia", Huffington Post. 2014, Digital Image: http://images.huffingtonpost.com/2014-05-29-graphic5.jpg.
4. Artsy. "Narrative." Accessed April 6, 2019. https://www.artsy.net/gene/narrative
5. Bowland, Margaret. *Party, Chelsea Gallery*. 2009. Source: http://www.margaretbowland.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1019401-780x1030.jpg
6. Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*. 1599-1600. Painting. https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039614343.
7. Calabrese, Omar. *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
8. Campbell, Joseph, and Safron Rossi. *Goddesses: Mysteries of the Feminine Divine*. Novato, CA: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013. p. 107.
9. Cézanne, Paul. *Bathers (Baigneurs)*. c. 1890. Painting. Place: Musée d'Orsay. https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARMNIG_10313261314.
10. Crowston, Catherine, Josée Drouin-Brisebois and Jonathan Shaughnessy, *Misled by Nature: Contemporary Art and the Baroque.* Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2012.
11. Curanaj, Tony and Edward Minoff, "Episode 33: Adam Miller", *Suggested Donation*, March 21, 2017. http://www.suggesteddonationpodcast.com/blog/2017/3/21/episode-33-adam-miller
12. Doerner, Max. *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting - with Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters*. First Harvest Edition ed. New York: Harcourt, 1984. Pp. 3-44.
13. Greene, Roland. "Baroque and Neobaroque: Making Thistory." *PMLA.Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 124, no. 1 (01, 2009): 150-152.
14. Gruber, Gerlinde, Sabine Haag, Stefan Weppelmann, and Jochen Sander, eds. *Rubens - The Power of Transformation*. Munich: Hirmer, 2017. p. 21.
15. Fenniak, Paul, *Unsettled Dust*. 2015. Source: Forum Gallery, "Paul Fenniak, b.1965." Digital Image: https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.collageplatform.com.prod/image_cache/2020x1160_fit/5c48b19da5aa2c830c8b4567/98557a6f766a6a2514d62a513c051788.jpeg
16. Hillman, James, and Thomas Moore. *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire*. London: Routledge, 1990.p. 42.
17. Hout, Nico Van, and Arnout Balis. *Rubens Unveiled: Notes on the Masters Painting Technique.* Antwerp: Ludion, 2012.
18. Jackson, Robert C., and Pamela Sienna. *Behind the Easel: The Unique Voices of 20 Contemporary Representational Painters*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2014. p. 46.
19. Jung, C. G. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Compiled by Aniela Jaffé. Translated by Richard Winston and Clara Winston. New York: Random House, 1989. P. 236
20. Kaup, Monika. "The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture." *Modernism/Modernity*13, no. 1 (01, 2006): 185-187. http://0-search.proquest.com.wncln.wncln.org/docview/215647546?accountid=8388.
21. Lawson, Susan. *Rubens*. London: Chaucer, 2006. pp. 15, 62.

22. Maidman, Daniel. "Lennart Anderson: The Road to Arcadia." The Huffington Post. December 07, 2017. Accessed December 05, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lennart-anderson-the-road_b_5413731.
23. Ndalianis, Angela. *Neobaroque Aesthetics in Contemporary Entertainment.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004. 22.
24. Noel, Scott. *Orpheus and Eurydice.* 2008. Source: Gross McCleaf Gallery. Digital Image: http://www.grossmccleaf.com/artistpages/noel44p.html
25. Poussin, Nicolas. *Triumph of Flora*. 1627. Place: Musée du Louvre. https://library.artstor.org/asset/LESSING_ART_10310119573.
26. "Poussin's Working Methods." The Fitzwilliam Museum. Accessed December 05, 2018. https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/paintinginfocus/poussinsworkingmethods.html.
27. Shane, Robert R. "Temporal Nomads: The Scandal of Postmodern History Painting." The Brooklyn Rail. June 1, 2017. Accessed December 06, 2018. https://brooklynrail.org/2017/06/criticspage/Contemporary-History-Painting.
28. Rubens, Peter Paul, *Feast of Venus*. c. 1635. Painting. Place: Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien. https://library.artstor.org/asset/LESSING_ART_10310119922.
29. Sisa, József. "Hauszmann, Alajos." In *Grove Art Online.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Accessed Jan. 11, 2019. http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy177.nclive.org/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000036937
30. van Dyck, Anthony. *Two Ladies-in-Waiting to Queen Henrietta Maria: Anne Killigrew and Unknown Lady (Anne Villiers, Lady Dalkeith (?) or Charlotte, Lady Strange, later Countess of Derby).* 1638. Painting. Place: Hermitage Museum. https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_10313879232.
31. Wacker, Kelly A. *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art.* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

9. Endnotes

1. C. G. Jung, ed. Aniela Jaffé, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Random House, 1989) 236
2. Quoted from one of James Hillman's notebooks by Dick Russell, *The Life and Ideas of James HIllman, Volume 1: The Making of a Psychologist* (Newark: Audible Studios, 2013), Ch. 13 1:07:10
3. Angela Ndalianis, *Neobaroque Aesthetics in Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 22.
4. "Neobaroque" appears in articles about many 19th-20th century architects, such as Alajos Hauszmann, in Oxford's Grove Art Online. József Sisa, "Hauszmann, Alajos." In *Grove Art Online,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, Accessed Jan. 11, 2019. http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy177.nclive.org/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000036937. For the use in recent art criticism, see Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1992) (first published in Italian in 1987), Kelly A. Wacker, *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) and Catherine Crowston, Josée Drouin-Brisebois and Jonathan Shaughnessy, *Misled by Nature: Contemporary Art and the Baroque* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2012).
5. The term 'baroque revival' is taken from the scholar Roland Greene, who describes neobaroque as a "revival, and often a parody of the baroque", in "Baroque and Neobaroque: Making Thistory," *PMLA.Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 124, no. 1 (01, 2009): 151-2.
6. The idea of parody is from Roland Greene, "Baroque and Neobaroque", 151-2.
7. ibid, 151.
8. Wacker, *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art,* 4.
9. Lang, "Neo-Baroque and Baroque: Situating Lucian Freud between Rubens and Rembrandt," and Wilcox-Titus, "Neo-Baroque Spectacle and the Female Body in the Work of Jenny Saville, Lisa Yuksavage and John Currin," in *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art*, ed. Kelly Wacker, 67, 97.
10. I mention the smallness and marginality of the narrative painting movement in order to accurately characterize its motives. Throughout most of the twentieth century, narrative figuration was dispensed of in European and American painting in favor of formalism and abstraction. (See Artsy, "Narrative," Accessed April 6,

2019. *https://www.artsy.net/gene/narrative*) The idea that creating narrative figurative paintings is still worthwhile in the twenty-first century is still very much a marginal one, albeit with slowly-growing critical recognition. There is a sense of transgressiveness and resistance that motivates contemporary narrative painters and fuels their individual voices.

11. Thanks to Prof. Suzie Dittenber for helping me to articulate this point and proposing the idea of deconstruction.

12. The phrase avant-garde has a broad meaning, but I use it to indicate that these strategies are informed by elements of Surrealism, Expressionism, Symbolism, and other early-mid twentieth century avant-garde movements.

13. In this context, the term realism is meant in a similar sense to naturalism - that is, a high fidelity to the structures of form observable in reality. It is not intended to refer to realism in the 19th century sense, meaning the portrayal of everyday people and settings. I have opted to use the term realism as opposed to naturalism because of its convenience in the "real vs. ideal" dialectic, which is central to the comparison of baroque styles.

14. Tony Curanaj and Edward Minoff, "Episode 33: Adam Miller," *Suggested Donation,* March 21, 2017. http://www.suggesteddonationpodcast.com/blog/2017/3/21/episode-33-adam-miller

15. "Poussin's Working Methods," The Fitzwilliam Museum, accessed December 05, 2018. https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/paintinginfocus/poussinsworkingmethods.html.

16. William Grimes, "Lennart Anderson, Painter Who Put Modern Twist on the Masters, Dies at 87", The New York Times. December 21, 2017, Accessed December 05, 2018.

17. Daniel Maidman, "Lennart Anderson: The Road to Arcadia," The Huffington Post, December 07, 2017, accessed December 05, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lennart-anderson-the-road_b_5413731.

18. An exception is with artists' sketches and studies made in preparation for large finished works, including those of Poussin. Many baroque sketches look surprisingly modern given their tendency toward more planar, simplified, and overall looser rendering of form. Anderson follows Cezanne and the moderns in adapting the loose language of the sketch for large-scale, finished works.

19. Susan Lawson, *Rubens*, (London: Chaucer, 2006), 15.

20. ibid, 62.

21. Gerlinde Gruber, Sabine Haag, Stefan Weppelmann, and Jochen Sander, *Rubens: The Power of Transformation*, (Munich: Hirmer, 2017), 21.

22. Robert C. Jackson and Pamela Sienna, *Behind the Easel: The Unique Voices of 20 Contemporary Representational Painters* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2014), 46.

23. Monika Kaup, "The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture," review of *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* by Gregg Lambert, *Modernism/Modernity*13, no. 1 (01, 2006): 185-187. http://0-search.proquest.com.wncln.wncln.org/docview/215647546?accountid=8388.

24. The article discusses the work of Adam Miller and others, not Noel specifically, but the quote is applicable to just about all of the contemporary painters discussed in this paper. Robert R. Shane, "Temporal Nomads: The Scandal of Postmodern History Painting," The Brooklyn Rail, June 1, 2017, https://brooklynrail.org/2017/06/criticspage/Contemporary-History-Painting.

25. James Hillman and Thomas Moore, *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire* (London: Routledge, 1990), 42.

26. Quote from James Hillman in Dick Russell's *The Life and Ideas of James Hillman.* (New York: Helios Press, Audible, 2013), ch. 13.

27. Joseph Campbell and Safron Rossi. *Goddesses: Mysteries of the Feminine Divine*, (Novato, CA: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013), 107.

28. Hillman and Moore, *A Blue Fire*, 43.

29. Chalk gesso ground is discussed in *Rubens Unveiled: Notes on the Masters Painting Technique* by Nico Van Hout and Arnout Balis. Antwerp: Ludion, 2012. See also Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting - with Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters*. First Harvest Edition ed. New York: Harcourt, 1984. Pp. 3-44.

30. Thanks to George O'Hanlon and Tatiana Zaytseva of Natural Pigments for suggesting this material in their *Painting Best Practices* workshop, which I attended in North Carolina in 2016. Also to painter Katherine Stone in her blog *Painting Stuff to Look Like Stuff* for discussing how to prepare dibond panels in the post, "More Apocalypse-Surviving Panels."

31. Nico Van Hout, *Rubens Unveiled: Notes on the Master's Painting Technique,* 2012.

32. This is observable at many museums with 19th century canvas oil paintings, many of which are considerably crackled, as compared to far older works on panel which have held up much better. Paintings executed on inert

surfaces that do not react to humidity fluctuations, such as copper or marble, often appear brand new even after hundreds of years. This is the result hoped for with painting on aluminum dibond panels.

33. Greene, "Baroque and Neobaroque: Making Thistory", 151-2.

34. Amongst other things. It is also an allegory of the phenomenon of synchronicity, which disrupts the 'orderly world' of cause-and-effect to enact confounding "acausal" events. The relation of trickster gods such as Hermes with synchronicity is explored in *Synchronicity through the Eyes of Science, Myth and the Trickster* by UNCA professor emeritus of psychology Allan Combs and his colleague Mark Holland. A jester figure appears on the cover of my edition of their book, which I was reading in the fall of 2016.

35. "Adam Miller: A Painter of Contemporary Epics." Juxtapoz Art & Culture. September 27, 2016. Accessed December 06, 2018. https://www.juxtapoz.com/news/magazine/adam-miller-a-painter-of-contemporary-epics/.

36. Images from Gerlinde Gruber et al., *Rubens: The Power of Transformation*, 202-3.

37. Thanks to professors Rob Anderson and Tamie Beldue for introducing me to Fenniak's work during critiques of this piece.