

Learning from de Kooning
and Polke: Shaping my Local
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Abstract

This thesis defines my use of works by Willem de Kooning and Sigmar Polke to shape the presentation of my local. This local makes reference to spaces in the cities I have grown up in: Sidney, Ohio; Easthampton, Massachusetts; and Madison, New Jersey. These three cities have shaped me into the person I am today and I look to collapse the distance between these spaces in my paintings. Both de Kooning and Polke have been helpful to me by assisting in solving problems within my own paintings. The work of these artists relate to my work because, their work also suggests feelings of the areas in which they lived. The problems upon which they aided me include structure, composition, color, and source material.

After studying the works of both artists, I have come to make different stylistic choices in my paintings. I now think more critically about the elements that go into each painting, as well as think about how the colors within the overall painting interact. De Kooning has influenced my work through a variation of brush strokes, as well as thinking about how different colors blend on the canvas. Polke has influenced my work through how I combine different images to create a work, as well as how I could change colors within my images to create a different effect.

In future paintings, I will take what I have learned from both de Kooning and Polke to continue to explore these ideas. I will not only work to create single landscapes through considering elements, I will also vary my brush strokes so as to create movement throughout the painting. This research portion of a studio art thesis has helped me by introducing artists with similar, yet different styles that have informed and shaped my understanding of painting.

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Introduction:

This written portion of my studio art honors thesis explores how both Willem de Kooning and Sigmar Polke have influenced the artwork I have made for the thesis.¹ My artwork is a depiction of both where I am from and of my current surroundings, as I move from place to place while continuing my education. I am constantly traveling between New Jersey and Massachusetts, all the while thinking about where I grew up: Ohio. In my work, I have used de Kooning and Polke's approaches of layering, or the overlapping of images to create intersections, and uses of color to inform my work. I have also used them as influence to better present where I live. I look to express a spatial representation of my "local," or the places where I live.

For the purpose of this paper, the term local is referring to the artist's surroundings whether that involves moving or remaining stationary. My paintings are symbolic depictions of me, created through a collection of fragments, or images taken out of the context of surrounding space. These works start as images that I pick out of pictures I have taken. After printing them, I cut out shapes of my choice. I then pick one element to begin with and find others with a similar theme, gluing them together on a piece of cardboard, creating a collage. The overlapping of images in these works creates depth by creating new scenes and intersections in the space allowing for objects to interact with one another. The onlooker can walk into the space and move from object to object as they unfold the new landscape that these images create. For example in the painting *Industry* (Figure 1) there is a relationship created between the statue and the

¹ See Figures 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9-15.

bench overlapping, as well as a depth created in the bike rack receding next to the statue. I see the imagery in each work as relating to one another in a theme, such as industry, education, and nature. I also create the theme by choosing images that contain the same materials, or that would be seen in a particular setting.

Through my paintings I am looking to learn more about the objects that surround me as well as about their relationship to one another. Every object is different, yet some contain similar colors – which, when placed next to one another, enhance each other. I further enrich and alter some of the colors in my collages as I examine the relationship between all of the objects. For example in *Coffee* (Figure 2) I have brightened the pastel colors in the coffee mosaic so that the colors would better fit with the other elements in the painting. The final element of the painting is the background; the specific color was chosen to strengthen how it interacts with the other objects. For some objects the color is close in tone and therefore does not create a huge contrast, while other colors have greater contrast. All of these elements work together to express a collection of images evoking where I am from.

The term “local” has many different definitions. It is usually used as a noun, local means “an inhabitant of a particular area or neighborhood.”² Local is where one feels at home, comfortable, and part of the community, although not everyone feels the same in one environment or community. For instance, one can live in a place for a long period yet never feel as happy as they may feel in another. It is possible for one to have multiple places where they feel comfortable. I myself have a few different “locals,” each with a different connection to my memories. In this paper “local” is about space and the cities in

² Jewell, Elizabeth J., Abate, Frank; *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2001, pg. 1000

which I have lived. I look to show different parts of physical locations in Sidney, Ohio and Easthampton, Massachusetts. I feel connected to the spatial relationship and memories I have from each city, and define my “local” through this connection.

One of my “locals” is where I grew up: Sidney, Ohio. I spent the majority of my childhood there, and there is a nostalgic feeling that continually brings me back. I always think back to different places my family and I went, and people we talked to in Sidney. My second local is Easthampton, Massachusetts - where I currently live with my family. I have spent the last ten years of my life here creating relationships and memories that will always keep me connected. Another part of my current local is also rooted in Madison, New Jersey where I have lived during the school year for the past four years. Although I feel a connection to these places and feel comfortable in each, I have different types of relationships with them.

Sidney is part of my past where I still have good family friends and a lot of childhood memories. Easthampton is where I spent the remainder of my childhood and grew up around my extended family and new friends. While I decided to leave Easthampton for school, I go back to Easthampton during breaks and am looking forward to moving back to that area after school. I don’t feel as strongly about Sidney and Madison as I do Easthampton even though I am still connected to each place. This feeling shows in how I use more images from Easthampton than I do Sidney or Madison.

Local can be defined by the people one surrounds oneself with, and not necessarily the place. The community a person chooses to live in may be the reason they explore the area, finding restaurants they like or different parks they want to continue going to. Often a community can help a person feel more included and not like an

outsider. These people can include family who have lived in the area for a while and have introduced them to new people, or co-workers from a new job that invites a person to do activities on the weekend or after work. Friendly neighbors who visit to help with an adjustment in a new community can also help a person start to feel like part of the society as a whole. For someone new to a place it is often the people they meet who become part of the reason they stay.

There are many reasons why a person chooses to stay in one location and consider themselves locals, some of which are outlined above. An artist could become a local by exploring their surroundings and finding hidden treasures that other people in that area take for granted. Artists like Willem de Kooning attempt to evoke where they lived at any one time, thus making New York City his local. Sigmar Polke was not necessarily representing his surroundings but was presenting more of his larger culture in Germany. Artists who stay in one place could use their local as a comfort, something they know; yet they may still look to find something that they did not see before.

Today, moving around is much simpler than it was even just a few decades ago. The internet has made it possible for people to remain connected to places they have been because they can use Google Earth street view to look at these places. Better travel systems and more fuel-efficient cars have also made traveling easier and faster in contemporary times. With these advantages, having multiple locals is easier to maintain no matter the distance between them. During my time at Drew University I have constantly traveled back and forth between Massachusetts and New Jersey. I can even look at my home in Easthampton on Google Earth, or through Face time with my parents, which makes it easier to feel connected.

Each section of this paper will focus on one work from each artist and discuss how the individual artist influenced my own work. Throughout the sections, I will analyze one of their works and explain how the work presents the artist's local. To conclude, I will connect both artists and explain how my work has changed after studying both de Kooning's work and Polke's work.

In this paper, I will talk about how each artist has helped me with problems that I have been having in my own paintings. Within the compositions of the paintings, I have been struggling with movement, as well as layering the images in the collage. I have also been trying to work on color relationships. Using both de Kooning and Polke to inform me, I have looked to these artists to help me in the compositions of my paintings, looking at how they use layering and color to construct a work.

I will also explain how my work, and style is different from both de Kooning and Polke. With de Kooning I will particularly write about how we are different in our representations of our "locals." De Kooning uses abstraction so as only to create a suggestion, while I recreate the images in my collages to be a realistic representation of the original object or space. In Polke, I will focus on where our source material comes from. Polke looks to many different objects for source material, such as playing cards and newspapers, while I have decided to take my own photographs and have access to the internet for source materials.

Willem de Kooning's *Easter Monday*, 1955-56

The painting *Easter Monday* (Figure 3) by Willem de Kooning was completed in 1956 and shown in the Sidney Janis Gallery.³ De Kooning painted this work while still in

³ Powell, Kirsten Hoving. "Resurrecting Content in De Kooning's 'Easter Monday.'" *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, vol. 4, no. 3/4, 1990, pp. 87-101. www.jstore.org/stable/3109017.

his last New York City studio before moving to Long Island. This painting has large swooping lines and blocks of color such as yellow, blue, and grey. It also has transferred newspaper hidden throughout the remaining white sections of the work. There are two different ideas de Kooning may make reference to in the work: the city, or the resurrection of Christ. I agree with art critic Thomas Hess, that de Kooning is actually suggesting the ever-moving city environment around him through the lines and shapes of color as well as the newspaper transfers, which further evokes New York City.

Within my own paintings, de Kooning has helped inform me on movement, and fragmentation, and color relationships. De Kooning has also showed me how different brush strokes can affect paintings and the movement within a painting. This section will further explain how de Kooning's style of painting has assisted me in solving problems within my own paintings. It will also explore the areas in which de Kooning and I are different in how we choose to depict our "locals."

Within my own paintings at the beginning of this thesis, I looked for help in deciding how I paint different parts of my collages. When painting I do not usually vary my different brush strokes, preferring instead not to see any brush strokes. This has led to the problem of my paintings feeling flat. In looking at Willem de Kooning's *Easter Monday*, I discovered that brush strokes help in activating the painting and creating movement. For example, in *Easter Monday*, the section on the left side of the canvas was painted quickly and contains streaks of the blue that sits above it. The quick brush strokes make the pink section appear like it is moving throughout the canvas. The bleeding of the blue into the pink sections evokes the feeling of people moving through the city and the

space that would exist between them. The blending from the section above represents more movement as shapes change based on the location of the people around the object. The streaks of blue suggest water, or sky while the green is a solid block of color and does not bleed into the colors around it, possibly suggesting a park or greenery along the streets in the bustling city. There is a streak of yellow breaking the section of green - which has been painted in a precise manner not allowing the green to bleed into the colors around it. Unlike the flesh-toned color discussed earlier in this paragraph, this green streak was not painted quickly. The paint is not thick or quickly applied to the canvas; instead it appears to be thought out and carefully applied. Here, de Kooning seems to have given more attention in representing the green square as a contained space.

After seeing how brush strokes can create movement, I started working on varying the different brush strokes within my own paintings. I started showing how thick different areas are through using thick paint. With these two ideas in mind I created *Sidney* (Figure 4), using thick brown and white paint in the upper right hand corner, I allowed the paint to build up to create the bark. I thinned out the paint for the Ohio Bicentennial barn beneath it to create further distinction between the two images. In the effort to portray my local the elements of each collage appeared flat and dull, instead of moving and interacting with one another. In my painting *Industry*, the background specifically appears flat and begins to overwhelm the other aspects of the work. I have condensed distance in this painting, bringing together different parts from *Sidney* and *Easthampton*. The different parts of the painting do not appear to work together. For example, the metal statue seems disconnected from the section of tree to the left of it. In looking at de Kooning, I was looking for a way to help with this particular issue in my

painting. I also had difficulty with how colors interacted on my canvases. In *Sidney*, I struggled with how the colors were connected to one another from the bricks to the mirror and the background. The quick brush strokes in *Easter Monday* showed me how blending colors on the canvas can create a subtle shift in colors, while mixing the color on the palate creates sharper differences in colors. These brush strokes also showed me how the artist can create motion in the paint. For example, the blue marks are quickly applied in a sweeping motion similar to water moving through a river. Through this technique of painting de Kooning activates the space for the viewer as they follow the blue stroke throughout the painting. Through this activation de Kooning adds depth to the scene evoking even more of the feeling of New York City, in its vast space and constant flowing of traffic that he would have seen and felt each day. These particular marks could also be seen as a sky or parts of it that are weaving in and out of view as the heights of buildings change across the landscape. The suggestion of a sky creates more of a feeling that this painting is a landscape of the city that de Kooning saw everyday from his studio window, as well as from his walks in the city.

The same compositional technique is something I applied to my painting *Nature* (Figure 5). In this painting I carried a moving background throughout the entire work to activate the background as de Kooning did. After working on *Industry* and then studying de Kooning's painting I was inspired by the way his paintings flowed, particularly *Easter Monday*. This style of a moving background was carried through my other paintings such as *Education* (Figure 6), and *Coffee*. By activating the background there is no dead space in the painting. Instead even more connections between objects are created. This background helps to enhance the nature theme throughout the painting in the objects.

Another example of the activation technique in any work is displayed through my work *Education*. I show how a solid background can also be active as some of the edges blend, creating a seamless transition between the object and the background. Through changing the way I paint the background I have started to allow the paintings depict a scene of where I am from and the environments that I feel comfortable in.

De Kooning clearly has a very different way of presenting his local, or environment, than I do. In de Kooning's painting the facture is far more fluid than in my paintings, indeed de Kooning avoids depiction in *Easter Monday*. Nevertheless, the grey marks throughout the painting evoke modern city buildings constructed of steel and glass. By 1956, these modern skyscrapers already shaped the New York City skyline. Next to the grey, the yellow within the painting brightens up the surface from the dirty white and greys that cover the canvas. De Kooning has muted the yellow a little bit by mixing some of the surrounding colors, again creating motion through blending colors directly on the canvas. When looking at the painting the yellow sections come in different shapes, sizes, and saturations, creating the feeling of motion. This resemblance of motion can be described through the explanation of de Kooning representing an abstract New York City landscape.

In my own paintings, I create realistic representations of objects and scenes in collages. I prefer for people to see what I see in the different images chosen for each collage. I also use these images to evoke different feelings in the relationships between the objects and images. Unlike de Kooning, I do not want to suggest a large moving city. Rather, I want to create the idea of a space where all of these images exist together.

Throughout *Easter Monday*, de Kooning evokes the feeling of New York City and his surrounding environment. De Kooning shows more of his surroundings and location through the newspaper transfers visible in different parts of the painting. These sections of newspaper are advertisements for films and shows premiering soon.⁴ The transfers evoke New York City, as De Kooning would have seen these advertisements all over in newspapers, posters, and other places. With these advertisements de Kooning is taking a physical piece of his surroundings and transferring it to his painting directly imprinting the local. One of the newspaper transfers on the right side of the painting are coupons, which might emphasize the specific area de Kooning is in as the coupons would most likely be to a specific store in that area.

The technique of transferring newspaper and prints onto a painting is where de Kooning and I are different. I do not transfer any of my images and instead rely on photographed images, which I work to recreate on a canvas. I paint what I see and apply each mark myself. In my paintings I like to see the vibrant colors of each image and how the colors interact with one another. I produce more realistic images of my “locals” than de Kooning did in *Easter Monday*. His representation is abstract and can be interpreted in various ways because definite figures do not exist within the paint, except within the newspaper transfers.

After transferring the prints, de Kooning did not leave the transfers completely untouched. De Kooning also painted over different parts of the transfers fragmenting the images. Within these fragmented sections de Kooning used the advertisements to support his theme of an urban landscape. While the text is not legible, the images - particularly in

⁴ Powell, Kirsten Hoving. “Resurrecting Content in De Kooning’s ‘Easter Monday.’” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, vol. 4, no. ¾, 1990, pp. 87-101. www.jstor.org/stable/3109017.

the lower right corner - are attention grabbing. This advertisement here is for a movie about Alexander the Great.⁵ De Kooning has left the area around the actor open a little so that he is visible, but has also painted over the corner framing the scene.

De Kooning fragments the advertisements by painting over sections blocking out certain aspects of each. Through this fragmentation de Kooning is controlling what the viewer sees of each advertisement within the painting, changing the meaning from just an advertisement, to a person or location. These advertisements now change the overall feeling of the painting. In fragmentation de Kooning is also showing layering within the painting. De Kooning would put down the transfer first, then paint over the sections of the transfer he wanted in order to create a new image. Looking specifically at the Alexander the Great advertisement in the lower right corner, de Kooning has almost completely blocked out the area around the figure and has also covered the shield with a stroke of paint. Through this de Kooning is putting the focus on the actual actor playing Alexander the Great, instead of focusing on the role, while also adding a figure to the composition.

In my own paintings, I use fragmentation through cropping out the different objects before combining them together on a canvas. I leave out the area surrounding each object so that I control the focus on the object and not its surroundings. Through fragmentation I am also able to more specifically focus the theme of each painting, as I single out one aspect or object from larger images. In several of my paintings these fragments are layered over one another hiding different aspects and cutting an object into different sections. For example in the painting *Nature*, I have cropped the white bar,

⁵ Powell, Kirsten Hoving. "Resurrecting Content in De Kooning's 'Easter Monday.'" *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, vol. 4, no. 3/4, 1990, pp. 87-101. www.jstor.org/stable/3109017.

sitting across the right side of the canvas, from a metal bench in Ohio. I have abstracted the bench so that no one would know where it came from except me. The idea was not to represent the entire bench, but rather, just this element. The texture and color was interesting in comparison with the other elements of the painting. Overlapping the pieces of each collage leads to intersections of colors and textures that have similarities and differences. In *Industry*, the two metal pieces interact with one another leading to a connection between the two through the material, even though they are from two different places. In *Education*, the main element of the metal sculpture is partially covered by the stone carving, although these two elements are made of different material, they have similar meanings leading towards education. These fragmentations allow for connections between two objects of different places that would not normally be seen together.

After looking and studying de Kooning's *Easter Monday*, I have thought more about my color choices and having colors blend into one another. In my recent paintings I have focused on where color appears and reappears, as well as how color activated the background. The examples mentioned earlier in the essay of the paintings with the green and maroon backgrounds (*Nature, Industry, and Education*) emphasize this thought process. De Kooning's gestural style of painting and allowing the colors to bleed into one another is also different from my approach. In my paintings I am usually very careful that the colors do not bleed, creating very crisp lines and details.

De Kooning's use of color in his painting also helps create movement. The viewer's eyes are constantly moving throughout the painting following not only the lines of color, but also seeing how de Kooning allows colors to bleed into one another. De

Kooning uses streaks and blocks of color to perhaps suggest movement within the city around him. The pink flesh tones evoke the feeling of people walking in the city, with the green suggesting a park. The same tone is one that de Kooning used often in his portrait paintings, such as in his *Woman I* (Figure 7) painting.⁶ The patches of the pink in the upper right side of *Easter Monday* and the upper middle left of the painting refer to both a larger group of people and a smaller crowd of people walking through the city.

The pieces I choose to put into my paintings create their own world of objects that represent where I have come from. De Kooning has pushed me to think more about how these objects interact with one another on the canvas and what they create together. As my paintings develop I will constantly be thinking about how each part of the canvas interacts with the part next to it. As well as, how the composition works together as a whole, while also taking a less nostalgic approach to the “local”.

Sigmar Polke’s *Goat Wagon*, 1992

The painting *Goat Wagon* (Figure 8), by Sigmar Polke was completed in 1992, and shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1996. This painting was created out of synthetic polymer on printed fabric, showing an interesting mixture of pattern and an image of a man standing next to a goat pulled wagon. The layering in this image combined with the color choices created a shifting illusion of what is in front. The different patterns help construct this scene, through creating an unusual background for the dominant view.

Within my own paintings, Polke has helped me with layering and color. Polke also made me think more about my own personal style and representation in my paintings. This section will also explain how Polke and I look to different areas for source material

⁶ Elderfield, John. “de Kooning, a Retrospective.” *The Museum of Modern Art*. 2011 pp. 253

to use when creating a painting. Polke has showed me how to combine different materials and sources into one cohesive work. After studying Polke, I have also come to think more critically about how to compose my collages and paintings.

An aspect of Sigmar Polke's approach to painting is evident in this work, informing both how it was put together and composed. A curator of one of his shows described Polke as having "made disorder his medium."⁷ In this, Polke was able to take anything, different materials, different ideas, etc. and create one cohesive image. This eclectic approach also points to his layering process and style. Polke layered different materials together from different sources such as fabric and cartoons. The seeming disorder in his work comes from his combination of materials, which seemingly have no resemblance to one another. Some people also viewed Polke as a contrarian who did not have a recognizable style, because he was constantly experimenting with different ideas, varying his approach in making works. Polke didn't just stick to one medium or idea; he frequently changed what he was working on throughout his career.

After looking at Polke, I started to think about my style and how I created each painting. I thought deeper about my process of picking images, and delved more into the reasons I was drawn to each. I discovered that I was attracted to objects with patterns and shapes that did not always look like they belonged. I like taking pictures of everyday objects, or sculptures that have images hidden within them. For example, in the bottom of the painting *Nature*, there are two circular shapes in the blue and the wood that resemble one another. Knowing where these two shapes come from, I know that I was interested in how they were formed. When putting the shapes side by side in a painting, I was trying to highlight this little detail in a larger work, while also trying to let it appear normal or not

⁷ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 7

unusual. I also thought about how I apply paint to the canvas. I usually work broad and then fill in the details later, creating layers of paint. This process can also take time, as I often have to wait for certain sections of the painting to dry before I can add the detail, which is then applied to the painting very carefully, often working on one section for a long period of time, and then coming back to it later to finish.

Sigmar Polke described his own working method in 2003 as “you can’t exist in a vacuum, you are rooted in time.”⁸ Polke appears to have rooted himself in the post war era after Nazi Germany, the time in which he was growing up and becoming an adult. Most of Polke’s work contains elements that can be viewed as remnants of Germany. Specifically in *Goat Wagon*, Polke is showing not only old fabrics that once had another purpose; he is also representing an image of a farmer with his goat pulled wagon. Polke used his surroundings and the culture of the area as sources for this work.

When I started looking at Sigmar Polke’s work, I was thinking about how I layer in my own process. I overlap images on the collage, and paint these overlapping images on the canvas to create different layers. I was starting to think more about how these overlapping images interacted with one another. Part of what I was having problems with, was the images I used did not always connect, or help one another within the work. For example in my painting *Sidney*, while the sections all make sense together to me, when looking at the finished product I do not feel like each element supports the others. Particularly through the brick and walnut images. Although they do not directly interact on the canvas, for the overall work, I do not feel like they support one another.

After looking at Polke I started to experiment with the different images I was using. I started using images that related to one another in texture to see how one texture

⁸ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 20

interacted with similar, or completely opposite textures. This is shown in my painting *Coffee*, I combined the blocky textures of brick and leaves, with the smooth texture of smoke. The way these textures have come together has created an interesting painting in how they interact on the canvas. These textures support one another because the bricks help block off parts of the painting, while the smoke helps the painting feel more fluid, giving the painting more movement.

Through Polke's work *Goat Wagon* I see how he layered different materials together to create the image. Polke pulled together textiles and printed images, which work together in the painting. Both elements support one another through presenting an idea of Polke's surroundings in Germany. The textiles show pieces of fabric that this man could see everyday in his house, such as a tablecloth, or wallpaper, or a bedspread. Polke presents an image that could be seen as the everyday man doing his job to make some money. With the textile and the image of the man together, Polke is able to represent the type of living people around him in Germany had after World War II.

Polke's layering process makes it difficult to discern what was in the foreground and what was in the background. It was said that the works from Polke, "demonstrate that a picture has infinite layers whose variety continually generates new meanings."⁹ These layers add to the image as a whole by creating definition that alters the perspective of the viewer. Instead of just seeing an everyday piece of fabric, a person may see a specific pattern and pay closer attention. In doing so one may discern more in the particular pattern. Polke's layering process has also been described as "postmodern play" through how he has put areas, and depicted items in his works into a state of flux, changing the way each item is viewed. A farmer, which in any other picture could be viewed as just

⁹ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 41

another person or perhaps a family member, is raising potential questions about culture, politics, and the economy. This image could also be ironically confronting the viewers with such matter. Polke could be using this image to show an aspect of his past, and perhaps comment ironically on connection to where he is from in Germany.

In my own work I have recently started thinking about what I am representing in my paintings. I was thinking more about the connection between the elements, and what people could see in them. For me the connection between Sidney, Ohio and Easthampton, Massachusetts is apparent, however, for people unfamiliar with these places, the connection might not be so clear. After talking with other people I am still working on this aspect of my artwork. I have taken some ideas from how Polke shows more of a connection with his local. I have started trying to work on more landscapes than collages while still using photographs from Sidney and Easthampton. Through painting landscapes I am showing larger, more detailed scenes of my “locals,” which can allow a viewer to better connect with my work. For example, *Tawawa Park* (Figure 9) is a landscape scene of a covered bridge that shows some of the detail around the bridge. In a collage, it is possible that I would have just painted the bridge itself and left out the context of the location. A person no longer has to take the images represented in a painting and create their own scene. I also want to start working on combining images, similarly to how Polke has done with *Goat Wagon*, to create my own imagined landscapes, further assisting the viewer in understanding my “locals.”

Polke went further than just depicting his surroundings. He illustrated feelings and cultural pieces of his local environment. By using the fabric in *Goat Wagon*, Polke was showing another aspect of his surrounding, presenting and utilizing an everyday object.

This fabric also grounds the male subject, by showing possible patterns and materials that would have existed in homes, such as tablecloths or bed sheets.¹⁰ The use of textiles allowed Polke to change a perception of art and what art could be created from. While also using it to ironically comment on painting and possibly the social conditions in East Germany. Fabric also allowed Polke to make a different statement than would have been made if this work was done on a traditional canvas. Polke looked to show how dependent people were on existing forms, and how those existing forms framed the way people thought and acted.¹¹ Through using ready-made images and textiles Polke was able to demonstrate this idea of dependence.

Ideas in Sigmar Polke's works, through the use of unusual materials and mediums in a mechanical kind of process,¹² appear through how he gives objects new meanings and puts these objects into a state of flux. This flux comes in the way he painted the objects to appear almost as if they are moving or by redefining how these objects are viewed. This appearance was achieved through the raster dot style because the clarity of the image depends on the distance away from the painting a person is. The meaning behind the scene in *Goat Wagon* would change if Polke had painted the scene of the farmer with the goat in a more traditional manner on canvas. The different fabrics would not be present, nor would the black and white farmer. Polke would have painted a landscape scene most likely of a farm with the farmer and goat wagon in the foreground.

This is an area where Polke in this image and I differ in our approach to representing our environments, because I fragment the images while Polke here creates a relatively cohesive painting despite the juxtaposition. I am looking to create a space

¹⁰ Dahl, Peter Schjel; *Let's See Writings on Art from The New Yorker*; Thames & Hudson, 2008; pg. 136

¹¹ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 101

¹² Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 74

where all of these objects exist together in my imagined landscape. Polke looks to comment in some way on the society of Germany that he lived in. Through *Goat Wagon*, Polke has used raster dots to pull the figures from commercial art, and place them in a setting where people think more about the meaning of the image and his choices. Polke himself even claimed “he liked it when an image became unrecognizable,”¹³ which helps to explain why he brought pieces together out of context. While my own artwork also takes the images out of context, I do not want my work to become unrecognizable. I want the objects depicted to show a part of where I am from, that is why I closely copy each part of a collage, so that the individual image does not get distorted.

Polke has given color to the background by relying on the dye of the fabrics while he paints on top of it in black and white. Through doing this Polke is further separating each component of the image. Polke is allowing a broader interpretation of the work through how he treats the pictorial areas of the work, as just what they are without altering or adding any colors besides black. This choice also helps Polke distance himself from the work, as well as distance the different elements of the work to each other.¹⁴ The use of the raster dot mechanical process in particular creates the distancing in elements of the work.

While Polke looks to distance himself from the world and remain elusive behind his works, I look to express who I am in my paintings. Through each painting I am showing a part of who I am, and what places and ideas are important to me. Industry as an idea is important because of my family, many of whom work in trades such as electrical or plumbing. It is still a part of my comfortable environment, because it defines

¹³ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 128

¹⁴ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 70

a larger part of how I am connected to the world. Education is also an important part of my life; because I love learning new things and helping others understand new ideas. I have always been comfortable in whatever school I am in, and find that as long as I am in an educational environment I am comfortable. The covered bridge and nature are important to me because I love to get away from people, and they both exist outside of the busy city. I am more comfortable in low populated areas such as in the woods or in a park. All of these ideas, tied in with my family, help determine my local, my comfortable environment.

When presenting his own work, many of Polke's friends credit his ability to see beyond the status quo of society and into the unstable values of piety, high tech society, and the shadow of Nazi Eugenics.¹⁵ It was these values in his environment that Polke showcased in his works. Polke wanted to "break free of conformity" and challenge the everyday ideas that conditioned society. He did this through humor and cutthroat contradictions in his work, like showing what everyday life actually looked like. He also looked to present the "impurity of a "life moment"" that existed in German society, there were always underlying problems and issues that people tried to hide from the rest of the world. In *Goat Wagon*, Polke is exposing the life of this man and what his job and low status says about society. Polke is exposing a personal memory of his childhood that was characterized by the simplicity shown in the figures in *Goat Wagon*.¹⁶ This memory adhered to the simplicity that was rooted in the public consciousness at the time.

Similarly to Polke, I am working from memories of when my family lived in Ohio. I take images from pictures that I have taken from a trip that my Mom and I took over the

¹⁵ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 70, 94

¹⁶ Polke, Sigmar; *The Three Lies of Painting*; Cantz 1997; pg. 84

summer. I looked for places that I always remembered us going, and things we always did together. While out there I was constantly remembering how my life was and what was important to me at the time. The values of the friends around us like how important it was to go to church on Sunday, and how after church my family would get in the car and go for a drive. We spent a great deal of time together, visiting the park, going to the public pool, or visiting family friends. These memories are reflected in my paintings, such as *Tawawa Park*. The bridge in this painting is located in Tawawa Park in Sidney, Ohio, and is a place that my family would go to often. I looked to represent this bridge just as I had remembered it and how it currently exists. In this image I am showing a single piece of a larger whole of my life spent in Sidney, I am showing a memory.

Sigmar Polke looked in many different places for source material for his work. This included places like potent photographs from newspapers and magazines.¹⁷ As well as cartoons, science fiction, psychedelia, and hippie mysticism.¹⁸ Polke would even look to playing cards, comics, artistic drawings, alchemical illustrations, and fairy tales.¹⁹ By taking images from all of these places, Polke is using his surroundings in his work to speak to an issue that he sees in society. These many different sources were what Polke had at his disposal to work from, in order to show how dependent people are on readymade images. This variety of sources shows that he had many different options when it came to every piece because there was no shortage of images around him. Polke would even take images with mistakes in them to show that even a high functioning society could produce imperfection.²⁰ In *Goat Wagon*, he is using material from textiles,

¹⁷ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 140

¹⁸ Dahl, Peter Schjel; *Let's See Writings on Art from The New Yorker*; Thames & Hudson, 2008; pg. 136

¹⁹ Polke, Sigmar; *The Three Lies of Painting*; Cantz, 1997

²⁰ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 140

as well as most likely a newspaper or magazine image. He then carefully recreates this image trying not to alter it too much, yet allowing it to become more than what it originally was.

In my own paintings, the images come from pictures I have taken around Sidney, Ohio and Easthampton, Massachusetts. I have chosen to take pictures of my environments so that the source material is fresh, and not previously altered. I have chosen certain objects to create a different kind of exchange that represents who I am, rather than purely my surroundings. By taking the pictures myself, I feel that I have more control over what is seen in my surroundings, as well as feeling more connected to each image. I look for everyday objects that people pass by without a second thought, or places that have had some meaning in my life. The covered bridge as I said earlier is a place that I always remember going when we lived in Ohio, therefore it is a special place to me and a memory of a childhood spent there. Unlike Polke, I do not rely on outside sources for my images and objects, instead having chosen to rely on the pictures I have taken myself.

Conclusion

Both Willem de Kooning and Sigmar Polke have had an impact on the way that I think about and approach my artwork. From the elements chosen and where they come from to the colors in the painting, I think about what I have come to learn from de Kooning and Polke. I think more about how different colors interact with one another, if the overall structure is drawing one into the image, and the meaning behind the image. Since the start of this research the direction of my work has shifted, still focused on

representing my local the paintings have shifted slightly from purely collages, into more traditional landscapes.

After studying Willem de Kooning I started thinking about color, and how different colors come together and interact on a canvas. Through this I focused more on the colors used within the objects in comparison to the background. I experimented a little with light and dark colored backgrounds and found that the way a dark background color highlights the other objects. De Kooning's use of grey in *Easter Monday* made me think of what colors I was choosing to fill my image. I wanted something that would highlight certain objects while blending with others. In *Education* I did this through blending the edges of some of the objects with the maroon background, as well as with the red block at the bottom that interacts with the sculpture in the center of the painting.

I have also been thinking about how colors interact with one another within the painting and the objects themselves. In my last few paintings I have thought about where certain colors appear in the overall painting, either next to one another or on opposite sides of the canvas. For example in *Coffee*, I have red balancing on either corner of the painting in an effort to equally distribute the color. With this I am thinking about how the overall colors on the canvas appear together. I am trying to pay closer attention to color relation and how different colors look next to one another. With this I will sometime alter the colors from the original collage to make a better relationship. I stay true to the original shape and feeling however, and think about how the work looks as a whole.

After reading several sources on Sigmar Polke, I started thinking about where my source material comes from. Unlike Polke, I use my own images, however I also have quick access to whatever image I want through the internet. By looking up a certain type

of picture I could achieve the same effect that I do by using my own pictures. However, by using my own images I feel connected to the work in a more personal way. I feel personally connected and involved in my work instead of feeling detached like an outsider. I feel that these works more fully represent my environments and me than if I had taken the pictures offline, or from another source. Polke had said that he felt like an outsider,²¹ and I want to portray a more personal side of me and be connected to my work.

I have also learned from Polke about how layering can affect the appearance of a work. Through layering he was able to create these spaces of flux where the viewer does not necessarily know what is in front. In my future paintings, I will be continuing to work on layering the different elements to create similar effects. I will be thinking more about how the layering of objects interact with one another to create these areas of flux, which can lead to a different interpretation of the painting. Polke was able to successfully layer different mediums together to create images that challenged the thought of the public. In my paintings I would like to use layering to create a deeper understanding of the surroundings that I am bringing together.

De Kooning also taught me about overlapping colors and how that can create different effects. In *Easter Monday*, the way de Kooning has let the colors bleed into one another creating a different kind of transition has been interesting to me. I also like how these marks interact with the newspaper transfers within the painting. De Kooning has used the marks of paint to frame certain aspects of the newspaper transfers, so that if one looks closely enough, they could start to tell their own story about what is happening in New York City at that time. With this knowledge I am looking to experiment with how I

²¹ Polke, Sigmar; *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963-2010*; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; 2014 pg. 81

represent different objects within my larger paintings. I will think more about how I am choosing to paint different objects and frame them within the larger image.

Both Polke and de Kooning have made me start thinking more about how I connect with my local environment. De Kooning achieved an evocation of New York City as he saw it through his travels and experiences within the city. Polke suggests something of the public mood in German Society during the post WWII era. Both artists used their mediums to present their view of the environment around them. While each working in a different way, both still influenced the way I think about and view the environment that I live in. I now think more about just representing the objects and instead am looking to evoke some type of feeling. I want more people to be able to form a connection with my work.

Through looking at and thinking about the way that de Kooning and Polke connect to and show their locals, I have started to shift the way I am presenting mine. I am starting to paint landscape paintings without the intentional ambiguity of de Kooning and Polke, which will allow the viewer to truly imagine one aspect of my local. Through a collection of these images, the viewer would better be able to picture where I am from, and have a fuller picture of the places that have influenced my life. The presentation of my local has shifted from many objects together to single places or objects that can still represent the larger theme within who I am.

IMAGES:



Figure 1. Bayleigh Murphy, *Industry*, 2016, Oil on Canvas, 34 x 32 in.



Figure 2. Bayleigh Murphy, *Coffee*, 2017, Oil on Canvas, 30 x 30 in.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/488916?sortBy=Relevance&ft=Willem+de+Kooning+Easter+Monday&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1>

Figure 3. Willem de Kooning. *Easter Monday*. 1955-56. Oil and Newspaper Transfer on Canvas. 96 X 74 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 4. Bayleigh Murphy, *Sidney*, 2016, Oil on Canvas, 30 x 30 in.



Figure 5. Bayleigh Murphy, *Nature*, 2016, Oil on Canvas, 37 x 32 in.



Figure 6. Bayleigh Murphy, *Education*, 2016, Oil on Canvas, 32 x 24 in.

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79810?locale=en>

Figure 7. Willem de Kooning, *Woman 1*, 1950-52, Oil on Canvas, 6 ft. 3 7/8 x 58 in. The Museum of Modern Art.

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79123?locale=en>

Figure 8, Sigmar Polke. *The Goat Wagon*. 1992. Synthetic Polymer Paint on Printed Fabric, 7 ft. 2 in. x 9 ft. 10 in. The Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 9. Bayleigh Murphy, *Tawawa Park*, 2017, Oil on Canvas, 27 x 38 in.



Figure 10. Bayleigh Murphy, *Road Trip*, 2016, Oil on Canvas, 28 x 28 in.



Figure 11. Bayleigh Murphy, *Untitled*, 2016, Oil on Canvas, 34 x 25 in.



Figure 12. Bayleigh Murphy, *The Big 4*, 2017, Oil on Canvas, 18 x 24 in.



Figure 13. Bayleigh Murphy, *Ross Bridge Scene*, 2017, Oil on Canvas, 14 x 22 in.

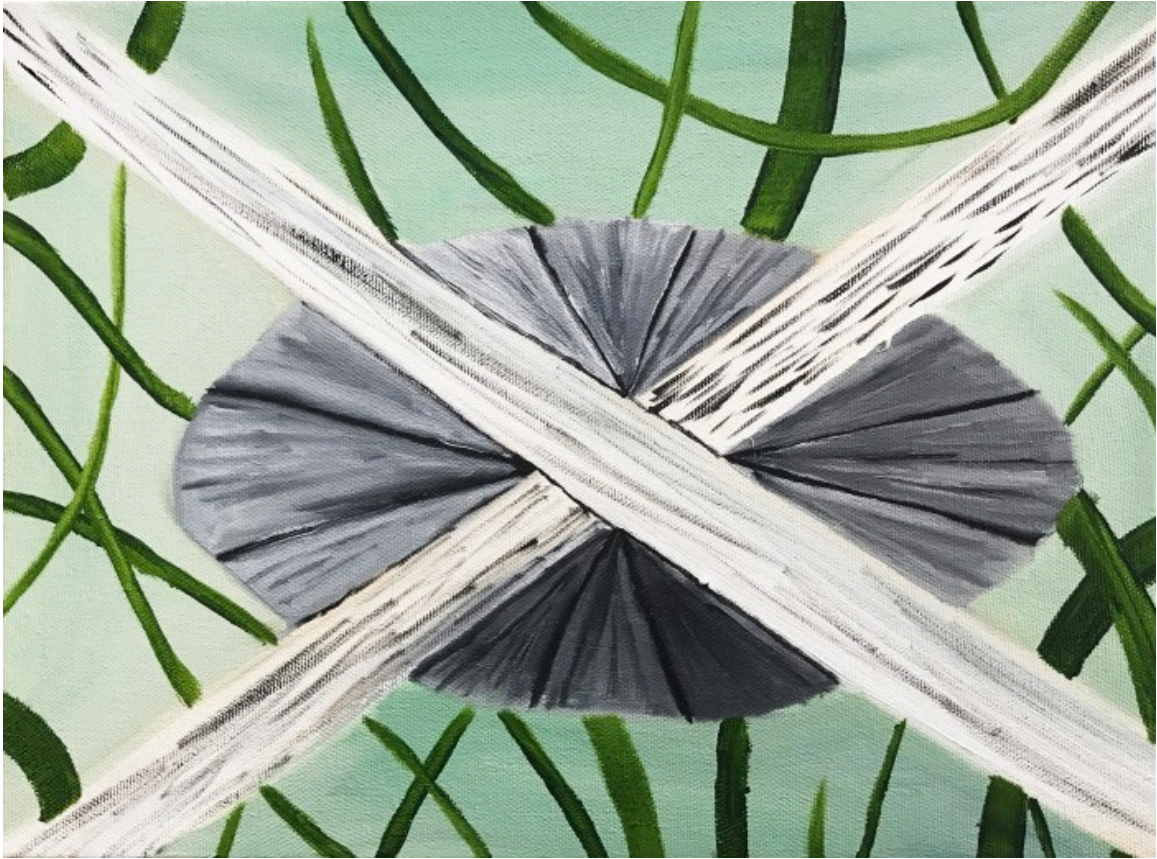


Figure 14. Bayleigh Murphy, *E-Town Gazebo*, 2017, Oil on Canvas, 9 x 12 in.



Figure 15. Bayleigh Murphy, *Marmon Valley*, 2016, Oil on Canvas, 26 x 32 in.

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