

fissures/fixtures

by

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fissures/fixtures

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This manuscript is dedicated to Araceli Perez for her endless support and to Redentor Perez for his boundless inspiration.

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## List of Plates

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There is a condition called myiasis, affecting both humans and animals, whereby parasitic larvae burrow into the flesh of their host and feed on its living tissue (*oh my iasis*, plate I).

In 1995, a team of biologists discovered a method of manipulating fruit fly embryos into developing fully functioning eyes in place of legs, wings, and antennae using multiples of a gene they named “eyeless”.

There are several species of fungi with the ability to trap round worms in ring-like appendages, which swell in the presence of prey, closing in on them like a noose (*disassembly required*, plate II).

The above descriptions characterize the varied subjects of the paintings contained in this thesis exhibition entitled, *fissures/fixtures*. These works represent the complexity of the world and the extensive diversity it houses. It is with a similarly complex usage of paint that I strive to capture the inherent intrigue of a subject so deeply intertwined with our own existence and yet so distant from our everyday thoughts. I examine, from the closest possible vantage point, the biological, social, and structural growth and decay that affects all things.

Although influenced by microbiology, anatomy and botany texts and illustrations, the “characters” of these paintings are not simply rendered portrayals of actual existing forms. Instead, I paint towards a sense of vague familiarity, where the viewer feels like they know, or at least should know what they are looking at. Each biological shape is intuitively borne out of its environment, which often consists of a soupy mixture of what I term to be cellular matter and inorganic debris. Each canvas/panel is a microscopically staged meeting between the natural and synthetic world. The inorganic lot mentioned above, like its cellular counterpart, remains always visually independent of any specific real world association. Based largely on physically imposing eyesores abundant in every urban setting (e.g.. exposed plumbing, junction boxes, traffic lights, custom doorknobs),

they are unassuming and easily dismissed as seen in *accumulated disinterest* (plate III). They represent that which is truly in opposition to a natural way of living, signifying all that can be categorized as such (e.g. paperwork, alarm clocks). This volatile solution in which these paintings are set is in constant flux as each unique component floats, rises, and falls according to its own weight. The lack of an absolute system of grounding and an elusive sense of real scale allow for a kind of rhythmically orchestrated fluidity in all directions. There is no understood top or bottom in these scenes, and the imagery can be assumed to continue indefinitely in every dimension. Aesthetic reasoning is all that has determined the proper orientation for these works.

Every work in this thesis has been produced using a multitude of painting styles and techniques, each with its own function and visual effect. There are areas of smooth and intricate detail over-glazed to a high polish, contrasted with others of busy translucent brushwork. Broad flat shapes of color are complemented by luscious thick gobs of paint which selectively accent several works. A full range of crisp and fuzzy edges continually pull objects in and out of focus. In part, this array of painterly qualities is employed for the purpose of expressing a continuous variation in the personalities of each “character” I choose to depict. Some bring with them an ominous presence as seen in *axon/axoff* (plate IV), while others are more quirky in nature, demanding a more whimsical aura about them (*semicolon*, plate V). The utilization of many styles at once allows both for a dynamic relationship amongst all parts of a particular painting, and for the referencing of one painting to another. For example, the broad green shape in the lower right of *isore* (plate VI) reacts not only to the solid cellular shape of the same color



to its left, but also to the solid green rectangle at the center of *dis/ex tractions* (plate VII). In this way the exhibition itself becomes a spatially complex organization of related themes and images.

Space itself is as important as any rendered form found in these works. In each instance, there is a tension set up by the arrangement and visual quality of every component, as they each struggle for importance within the field of the image and for placement within the illusionistic depth of the work. Something that pulls forward during the initial viewing of the piece will suddenly appear to recede behind another painted shape (*wormhole*, plate VIII). This fluctuation and spatial uncertainty is further instigated by the use of three dimensional forms which usually emerge from the surface into the physical space of the viewer. Simultaneously, these sculptural elements move beyond the flat image by crossing over to the edges of the painting, calling attention to the physicality of the object (plates V, VI). The extreme illusion of some painted areas causes them to appear to have more dimension than those with actual physical depth. The longer a piece is viewed, the more these relationships have room to evolve (*Organned Owner*, plate IX).

The decision to build onto the panels has real roots in the subject matter I paint. It is often very clear what the fundamental units that comprise my forms are. They typically originate in the aforementioned “soupy mixture,” building up in density as some areas become saturated with both organic and inorganic clutter. As in any situation where saturation leads to excess, some examples could include an overgrowth of cells or

the accumulation of physical garbage, a once non-threatening party (cell or paper bag) is now a physically imposing fixture commanding both space and attention. As these new forms continue to grow it becomes clear that they cannot remain contained, and they must manifest themselves as something completely new (tumor or city landfill). The three dimensional additions to the work *are* the physical manifestations of that which could no longer be contained by the painted image.

On another level, the objects built into the substrates help to establish a comparison between the work and the human body. Much of the imagery I use is based on the inner workings of the body, and many of my paintings could be characterized as internal landscapes (plates IV, V). In some cases, the three dimensional forms precede the image, and are ignored during the process of applying paint. The image and modified panels coexist but remain unaware of each other's presence. Each becomes a constant that the other must contend with. To put it another way, I make objects that cannot escape the image imposed upon them, and paintings that cannot escape the structure upon which they exist. This is analogous to a person's inability to escape that which they carry inside of them, whether its a feeling of remorse, a mental affliction, or stomach cancer.

Carefully selecting the subjects for my imagery, I am drawn to those phenomena in life that are usually overlooked in art, having qualities generally presumed to be "ugly". Admittedly, cancer and fly embryos are not the most romanticized subjects in the history of painting; however, as complexity has emerged as a major player in the art presented here, it is the beauty in the complexity of things that I admire. With a

seductive handling of paint and a bright unconventional palette, I instill a sense of the exquisite into otherwise “lowly” things, meanwhile exposing the human narcissism evident in much of traditional painting.

With all of the references to garbage, disease, scientific exploration, and egotism, it is obvious that ongoing social conditions are important influences to the execution of these works. Much of my motivation to paint is derived from humankind’s progressive inability to function in synch with the natural world. However, it is clear through the subtlety of these expressions and the comical nature of some of my titles, that these works are satirical and not activist in nature. I hope not to preach for a better future, but instead point a cynical finger at the one which awaits us, nervously laughing all the while.



Plate I



Plate II





Plate III

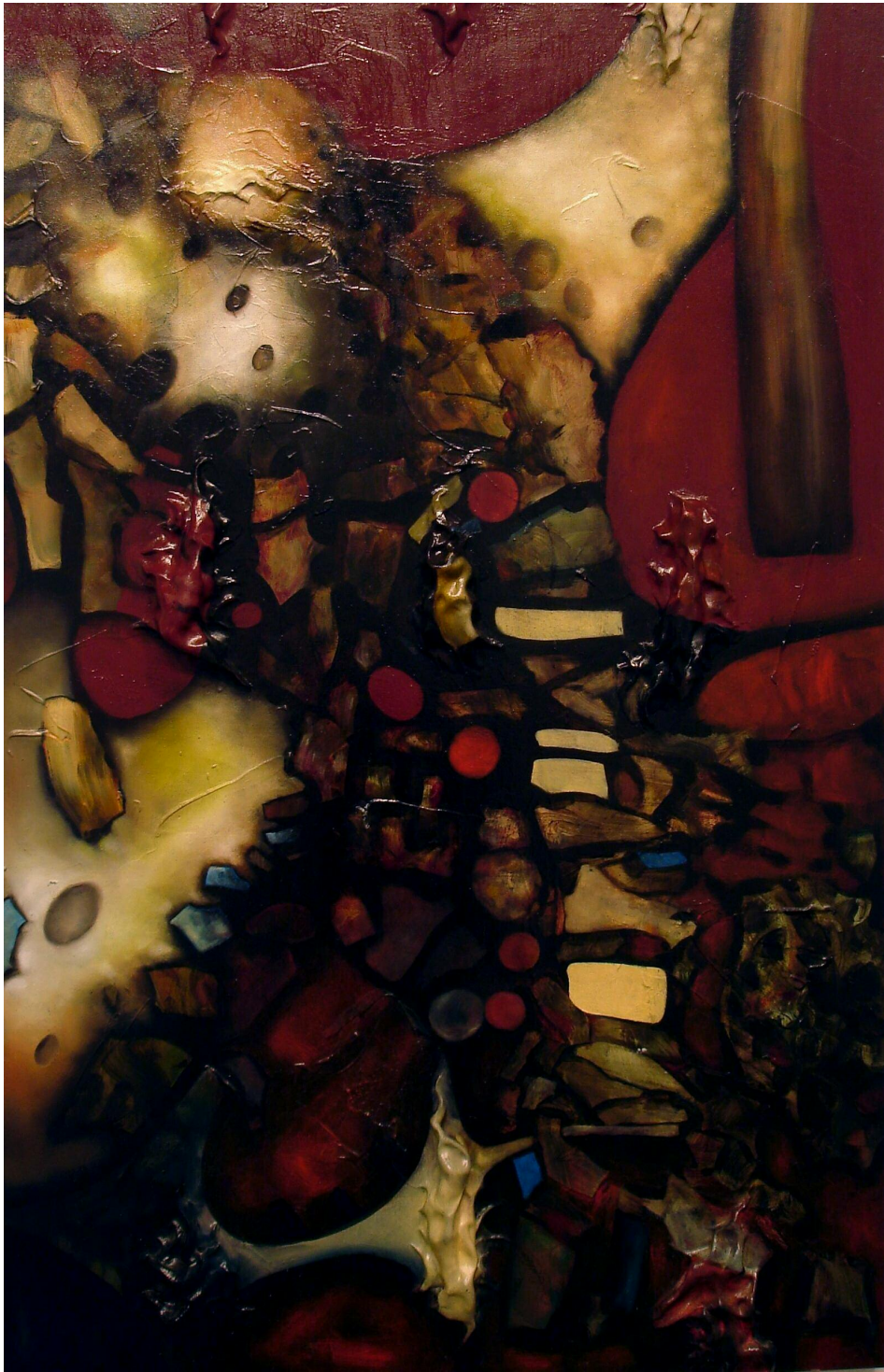


Plate IV





Plate V





Plate VI



Plate VII





Plate VIII



Plate IX

## **Vita**

Alvaro Perez was born on February 10, 1979 in Wichita, Kansas. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting from Texas Tech University in 2002. Upon the attainment of his Master of Fine Arts degree from Texas Christian University, he will continue on his selected path as artist, educator, husband, and father.

## **Abstract**

My paintings represent the complexity of the world and the extensive diversity it houses. It is with a similarly complex usage of paint that I strive to capture the inherent intrigue of a subject so deeply intertwined with our own existence and yet so distant from our everyday thoughts. Painting towards a sense of vague familiarity, I paint the biological, social, and structural growth and decay that affects all things. Each canvas/panel is a microscopically staged meeting between the natural and synthetic world.

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