

PORTER, JAMES ANTHONY, M.F.A. Dystopian Dilemma. (2009)
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This thesis consists of a text and a series of five oil paintings that explores the psychological complexities and relationships that exist within the 21st Century post-modern American society.

DYSTOPIAN DILEMMA

by

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Approved by

Committee Chair

To the precious memory of my dear and loving mother
Gerda Barbara Porter (September 6, 1942-February 27, 2008).

You sacrificed everything for me to be where I am today.

I miss you and love you very much!

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

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Date of Acceptance by Committee

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DYSTOPIAN DILEMMA

My role as an artist is to examine and define my own personal and cultural complexities manifested through the visual language of drawing and painting. I believe my subconscious and imagination inform how I view reality and space beyond perception. These images reflect the past, present, and future that has shaped this reality. I am also interested in examining the psychological complexities facing mankind and in particular my experiences as an African-American male. I seek to create images that reflect who I am, where I come from, and how I exist within this 21st Century post-modern American society. I aspire to communicate on a deeply emotional and psychological level that expresses an overall type of mood or atmosphere. I employ various compositional elements to reflect movement through the use of line, color, and shapes. My work is a study in contrasts that combines real and fictional events things, and people.

Conflict and internal struggle, which are recurrent motifs for my paintings, create tension and serve to explore the physical and emotional relationship that exists between people. These emotions are expressed and contained throughout the narrative within intentionally ambiguous surrounding environments. I am interested in presenting to the viewer paradoxical representations imbued with metaphorical meanings. My paintings are merely suggestive, never specific. Within

These works, I will attempt to examine the human condition that communicates a particular mood or aura of surrealism. I am interested in challenging perceptions of reality.

The figures in my paintings act in the service of psychological self-portraits culled from my experiences as a youth. Engaging the viewer creates a sense of present involvement. I do this by attempting to initiate eye contact and creating a gaze between the figure in the painting and the viewer.

My work includes a personal iconography that contains symbols or signs, which by their very nature create a sense of ambiguity. For example, recurring motifs included are children's toys to suggest playfulness and targets that may imply violence. Some of these references have often held within me an unconscious sense of curiosity. The relationship between the icon and the figure is explored within the context of the narrative scene.

Within my paintings, optimism or pessimism may be reflected through various natural elements in many ways. Blowing winds may suggest change, a stormy sky may suggest danger, or turbulent water may suggest the struggles of life. On the other hand, optimism, hope, promise, and an encouraging future may be represented by other means. A bright and clear, sunny day may be viewed as hopeful and promising or stilled waters perhaps represent calm and stability. The exact identity of these environments and settings and their significance are left open to interpretation.

I believe that the dichotomies that exist within nature are somehow intertwined and constantly changing as they mimic human life itself. Further, to me, reality and illusion are equally at flux. The psychological state of inflicted despair or hope is inscribed in the faces of the figures in my paintings that are sometimes partially concealed and hidden from the observer's site. Similarly, themes of conflict and internal struggle and of hope are interlaced.

For instance, a lone child isolated within an open expanse of space expresses a sense of alienation and psychological remoteness by existing in his or her own private world or space. I like to portray figures that have vacant or stoic facial expressions giving them the sense of heightened introspection. Looming shadows sometimes act as doppelgangers and is an illusionistic device to help enhance the sense of the overall drama as they try to mimic otherworldly forms.

In my work I also enjoy using a quiet theme and pensive atmosphere to evoke an aura of melancholy. By using this technique I intentionally place the viewer as a casual observant to perhaps force them to witness an uncomfortable situation.

In contrast, I tend to depict figures whose gaze lies off of the picture plane and out of the observer's field of view reflecting something that is only accessible to him or her. I believe that this compositional device evokes a sense of mystery and plays on the observer's own perceptions of reality.

Depicting figures that are physically separated within the same space also reflects a psychological sense of alienation and isolation. A physical distance can be

equated to an emotional distance. Even a single figure can be emotional distant from reality. The main characters in my paintings consist primarily of children and scenes reminiscent of my own experiences faced as a youth. I like to place children within the same context that adults are faced with in everyday modern experiences. Themes of fragmentation, isolation, or a loss of innocence convey emotional and psychological tension within dream-like landscapes. Body gestures and postures reflect a type of non-verbal communication. Their clothing can also suggest specific attitudes, which incorporates an inherent vernacular language that can be culturally distinctive and contain within it its own vocabulary as a way of communicating among youths.

I believe that my narratives are enigmatic, engaging, and complex as life itself and strive towards being more evocative emotionally and psychologically than realistically. I am interested in examining and questioning these complex problems of modernity and the tension that underlies. I want to create an atmosphere of contemplation of events past, present, and future.

Another compositional device used consists of slightly tilted spaces that create a sense of instability. The use of light concentrates attention on the essentials, partially eliminating extraneous details and casting the sometimes unimportant in shadow. My palette consists of mostly warm, earth tone colors that produce intensity and weight within the image with the overall tonal value kept in the mid to low range. This helps to further emphasize the unfolding drama.

In conclusion, my paintings deal with the transcendence of the harshness of life, the struggle of communication, and the meditative state of being somewhere else subconsciously. This may in fact only exist within the space that lies between or beyond life and death itself. I feel that the true exterior of forms is only arrived at through a punctilious development and investigation of the interior self. Only then are the forms' true essence revealed. This series of paintings is reflective of my overall experience thus far as a student-artist at UNC-Greensboro and hints on the body of work I will seek to examine, investigate, and create in the near future.

CATALOGUE

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|-----------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1. <i>Baptism 8/29/2005</i> | Oil on Canvas | 84" x 96" |
| 2. <i>Pharaoh's Dance</i> | Oil on Canvas | 36" x 48" |
| 3. <i>Opening Act</i> | Oil on Canvas | 55" x 63" |
| 4. <i>Reluctant Soldier</i> | Oil on Canvas | 30" x 53" |
| 5. <i>Brothers</i> | Oil on Canvas | 42" x 54" |