

Lucas Elliott – B.F.A. Thesis Report

When I was first accepted into the B.F.A. program, I honestly had no clue what I wanted my thesis to be about, Many people told me to just paint what I wanted, but the problem was that I did not know what I wanted. I spent so much of that first semester problem solving, thinking of anything that would work as a show. What I did know was that I wanted to do something personal; something that had to do with what made me who I am today. I wrestled with the ideas of religion, masculinity, and even my own childhood, but in the end nothing seemed right. Then one night, as I was watching *3:10 to Yuma* with my girlfriend, a light came on, “why not folktales?” Why not do something that not many people remembered, but enjoyed? With this epiphany *Retold* came into light.

It was not so much the fact that I wanted to portray folktales, but that all I really wanted to do was tell a story. I grew up fascinated by stories: the action, the adventure, the joy, the sadness, and finally the triumph. As a child I would read numerous books, ranging anywhere from the *Chronicles of Narnia* to *Star Wars*; even the *Bible* was inspirational as each part was told with such strength that it stirred my imagination. What really made me come alive were the illustrated stories, such as children’s books and graphic novels. Through their use of imagery, the story popped off the page, and each book was different with its own unique style.

Occasionally I am asked who influenced me to become an artist, and many people expect me to spout out some well known artist, such as Pablo Picasso or Rembrandt. However, I came into my love for art through comic books and artists such as Joe Madureira, Jim Lee, and Humberto Ramos. With their work in hand I would sit and

read, and still do, for hours about heroes, villains, and the struggles of their worlds. These artists drew and concocted such enthralling works of art, that I was inspired to become an illustrator. Yet that does not mean to say that I was solely inspired by illustrational work.

During my first art classes in high school, I would dwell upon the works of the Italian Renaissance artists; ranging from the fresco's of Raphael to the schematic drawings of Da Vinci. The Italian masters' use of color and perspective were so complex and well planned out. Each work was skillfully executed and portrayed so much life. Over the course of the next nine years I was introduced to more modern art and artists. Today I find myself drawn to the work of Justin Bua, an urban artist based in California.

Justin Bua describes his work as "Distorted Urban Realism," where, through the use of form, he creates exaggerated descriptions of people. His distortions are often severe, but manage to successfully compliment the subject he is trying to convey. One such piece would be "1981" where in the scene; a street dancer performs as a crowd is gathered around. Bua himself finds his inspiration from artists such as George Bellows, who has, consequently, been a motivating force to me as well.

I happened to stumble upon the work of Bellows a few years ago while working on a master's copy project for class. I came across his painting "Stag at Sharkey's," probably one of his most well known works, the painting captures the moment when two boxers are in the heat of battle, caught in the moment. While looking at the work I felt that he displayed so much movement through the use of his brush strokes that it almost felt as if I were among the audience placing bets. The feeling of taking part and

getting caught up in the action is what has always interested me in illustrations, whether that be through the work of Raphael, Bua, or Bellows. More importantly, it is this emotional connection and involvement of the viewer that is quintessential to telling a story. As my thesis revolves around the concept of retelling folktales, this dynamic, the painting to viewer relationship, is something I have been striving to achieve while attempting to pay appropriate homage to the story I am portraying.

Wheat also drew me to the folktales was the fact that they have survived for so long, men and women who endured the hardships of our newly formed nation. I grew up with these stories, reading them in elementary school and just reading their stories for fun. Most of these stories are exaggerations of people, many fictional, but others based on real people, who have been built up to the point of obscurity. I wanted to take these stories and make them my own, to create moments in time that were important to the characters. Some were easier than others, while some pieces aren't even scenes from their stories, but scenes of their legendary personas. Just as their stories are exaggerated, I wanted to recreate the characters as well, to make them as my own. I have always thought about what I wanted to paint, to form my ideas before I finalize them, but as I have become more of a painter I have learned to trust the paint more than my own ideas and have begun to let the paint do the talking. I have learned to mesh my drawing style with my painting style more, to create a work that is more complimentary. One the first paintings that I tried to be sketchier with was "where's Johnny?" beginning to work in this manner gave my art much more freedom and ideas, after only working on my Johnny Appleseed piece for two days, I finished it. Out of all the works that I have accomplished through the B.F.A. "Where's Johnny?" was the most successful for it

conveyed what I really wanted to show with my art, to be loose, to be strong in form, but at the same time, to tell a story. As my style changed, so did the materials that I worked on.

When I took my first painting class I was taught on pre-made canvases, but as I gained more experience with the paint I also worked my way up knowing how to build my own canvases. Around the time of the President's show this last year I decided to try a few things differently by using masonite instead of traditional canvas. I found that by working on this material, it has a smoother surface, holds paint better and that I could play more to my sketchier style that I was enjoying more. I also attempted to work on illustration for the same reason, being a heavy weight paper. I find the masonite has overall been the best material to work on, however, and will probably stick to that for a while as I continue to grow and mature as an artist.

As I look back on the last year being in the B.F.A. program, I feel that I have accomplished a lot, not only as an artist, but as someone who is getting ready to graduate. My art and style have developed and matured so much in the last few semesters that for the first time in the five years that I have been here at UAF, I feel like I know what I want to do with my art and where I want to take it. I have always wanted to do comic art and that will happen down the line, but the fact that I know that I have so many more options and sources of inspiration I can do something new and different.