

Digital Drawing Room: MFA Fine Arts featuring Siana Smith

Interviewed by Kristen Wawruck



Siana Smith

Starting May 10, you can view work by students in the MFA graduating class on the website 2021.CCAMFA.art and in the [Class of 2021 Showcase](#).

Works in this series were written by students in Glen Helfand and Maria Porges' respective graduate writing seminars this past fall and spring.



9.9.2020, 37.70184614419476, -122.40675640172758, 2021.

Kristen Wawruck: How do you choose your subject matter?

Siana Smith: I start with a specific concept in my mind and things that I want to say. The subjects come from my observations of life. Depending on what I continue to think about, I arrange objects for a photoshoot. Based on that arrangement, I paint.

I ask myself, "how do I transfer these concepts into my work?" My paintings are not abstract—my work is representative. I am interested in traditional veritas paintings. I find they are still very applicable, except now we just have contemporary stuff—contemporary commodities.

KW: Some of the objects you depict hold a promise, or a threat, of transformation to the self. Do you see them that way?

SS: The designer objects we put on ourselves can bind the body but also shape our minds. What we value really becomes a question of ownership. Do I own them, or do they own me?

KW: I'd love to hear about your use of scale since your work has increased in size over the last two years.

SS: [Mark] Rothko was a significant influence on me. You can really step into his work. The closer you are to a painting, the more immersive it is. His colors just swallow you up. You can feel your emotion physically, like wonder that swallows you. The mood and emotion wrap you. Some people will say "small is intimate" when looking at smaller works. But the viewer is outside of those paintings as if they are windows.



The Lure of the Skin, 2019.

Then, it's not really intimate, right? The opposite is true when you paint larger than life-size, because the objects' symbolic meanings are much bigger than their actual usage; size represents status. Through the objects, we think, "how do I see people, and how have I been judged?" You have to really detach yourself from the objects to see those things as what they are. It becomes more abstract in aiming for a haptic view, even though I paint figures.

KW: How, if at all, do you see your work relating to advertising? Are you ever using ads as source material?

SS: I have not been using advertisements. Many people have made this observation, and I think about it. I think maybe people see the visual connection through my painting's glossy surfaces. But ads are only about the surface, right? That's why they can only last for a short period. It's a surface without depth.

Take, for example, my work *Weapon* (2020, oil on canvas, 72 x 26"). The sharp edges are exaggerated to make it look dangerous. I also wanted to use a worm's eye view so that you have to lift your head. Like in worship, the viewer has to look up. It becomes monumental.



crumpl, 2020.



Pink Backpack, 2020.