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### The Land of Reverie

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*The Land of Reverie*

by  
Sarah Moon

A thesis presented to the  
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*The Land of Reverie*

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## Abstract

As children we are fascinated by the mythical. Imagining the attractive or even the disturbing serves as an escape from reality. By painting unicorns, vast surreal landscapes, and imaginative playscapes my work expands the white cube gallery into an immersive extension of my imagination. By viewing the canvas as a portal into a world where limitations dissolve, I paint acidic colors, fluid boundaries, and a malleable reality.

My studio practice is inspired by artists who experiment with color and scale like Kenny Scharf, Katharina Grosse, and Pipilotti Rist. In my colorful, large-scale works I explore the transformative power of play and how it can transport the viewer into a dreamlike realm beyond the confines of the gallery space. My paintings use traditional techniques on canvas combined with artificial craft materials such as rhinestones, collages, and glitter to create a maximalist, fantasy escape for the viewer. In my work I am able to blend dance, intuitive mark-making, painting, and collage together to achieve an exhalation of delight, wonder, and joy.

The following text explores and elucidates my processes of making paintings and creating videos that encapsulate the overwhelming feeling of childlike awe, dreams of vintage pop-culture cartoons, and personal memories of play.

## Introduction



Fig 1.1. Sarah Moon, *Down the Rabbit Hole*, 2023, Dry point and watercolor monoprint with rhinestones on paper, 5"x7", Photo: Sarah Moon

Throughout my life, I have always been drawn to the mythical. By imagining the fascinating or even bizarre, dreaming serves as an escape from reality by offering a sanctuary for my mind to wander. I paint unicorns, hypnotic landscapes, and mythical creatures like in *Down the Rabbit Hole*, a monoprint that symbolizes boundless creative potential.

I am inspired by surrealist painters such as Salvador Dali and the ways he uses paint and canvas to spark curiosity and expand our imagination. My subconscious thoughts frolic freely on the canvas when I am painting. I roll out yards of empty canvas and use movement to cover the blankness with an intuitive underpainting that I then bring into the studio to develop imagery and apply ornamentation. An open-ended sense of wonder transforms an artwork into an all-encompassing, immersive experience.

Throughout my childhood, I spent hours watching television cartoons like *Care Bears* and animated films like *The Last Unicorn*.<sup>1 2</sup> These hyper-saturated and wonderful worlds began to dissolve hierarchical boundaries and morph memories into shapes. I am inspired by the imaginative visions and hypnotic imagery in movies like *Alice in Wonderland*, and I try to include imagery that conjures up memories of these visceral animated experiences.<sup>3</sup> These otherworldly storylines and captivating visuals made me believe that through art, reality is malleable.

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<sup>1</sup> Care Bears are multi-colored bears, painted in 1981 by artist Elena Kucharik to be used on greeting cards from American Greetings. Later the characters were conceptualized into a television series set in a faraway place in the clouds.

<sup>2</sup> *The Last Unicorn* is a 1982 American animated fantasy film developed from a script by Peter S. Beagle in which a unicorn learns that she is the last of her species on Earth, and the unicorn goes on a quest to discover what happened to the rest of her species.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Carroll's beloved fantasy tale is brought to life in this Disney animated classic. When Alice, a restless young British girl, falls down a rabbit hole, she enters a magical world.



I found a similar connection to the “Pop-Surrealism” movement conceived by painter Kenny Scharf.<sup>4</sup> I related to the connection between pop culture and surrealist painting techniques. At the flick of a paintbrush, my canvas encourages a departure from reality and entry into a world of imagination.

The painting practice of Katharina Grosse has been informative to my way of applying paint in a large scale, performative manner.<sup>5</sup> Through her use of spray guns and fluorescent pigments, the white cube turns into a portal to an otherworldly landscape. By witnessing her process, I began to expand the qualities of acrylic paint. I mix paints with various mediums to drip, splatter, sponge, or airbrush color across yards of canvas.

This text follows the meandering route through imagination and material that I have developed in my studio practice between 2022 and 2024. I will examine my recent paintings, performances, and images through the lenses of process, inspiration, and magic. Finally, I explore the concept of play and fantasy worldbuilding to craft a reality that exudes wonder and delight.

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<sup>4</sup> Kenny Scharf (American, b. 1958) is a painter and installation artist associated with pop culture, comic books, and the Lowbrow art movement.

<sup>5</sup> Katharina Grosse (German, b. 1961) is a visual artist known for creating large-scale, site-related installations to create immersive visual experiences.

## Chapter 1: Wonder to Worldbuilding



Fig 2.1. Sarah Moon, *Unicorn Daydream*, 2023, Watercolor monoprint on paper, 16"x20", Photo: Sarah Moon

The unicorn is a symbol for limitless imagination and is often associated with an untethered creative vision of abundant possibility. The unicorn spans centuries of art and objects as it appears in Medieval tapestries, ancient Greek Texts, biblical sources, medieval tapestries, and renaissance paintings.<sup>6</sup> Throughout my childhood, I saw unicorns as magical companions and vessels of color, beckoning me into the world of art. It is through this symbolic creature, as shown in my monoprint, *Unicorn Daydream*, that I capture this concept.

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<sup>6</sup> "Unicorn," Perth Museum, March 7, 2024.

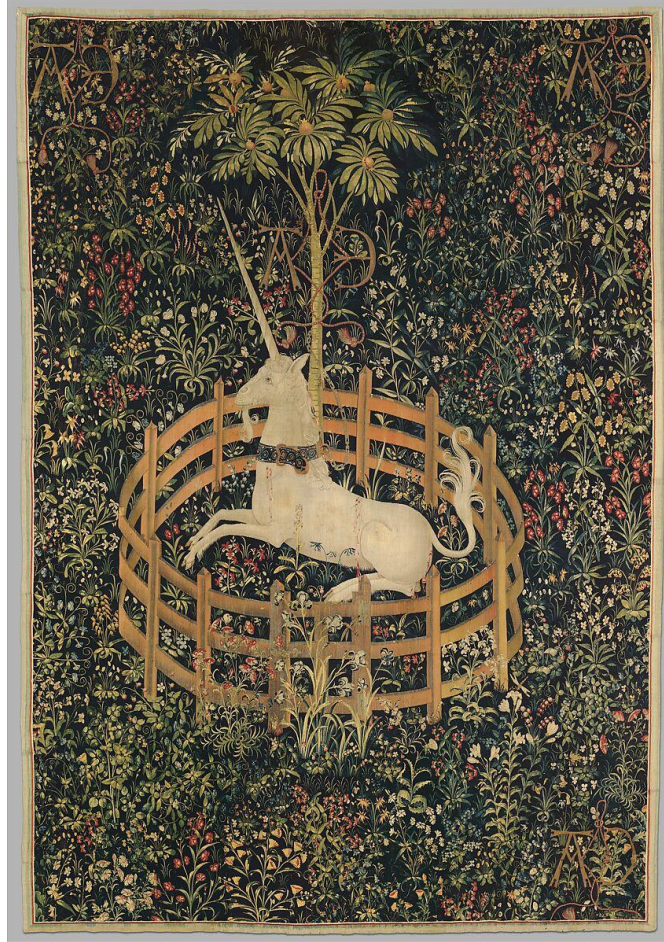


Fig 2.2. The Unicorn Rests in a Garden (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495–1505, Wool warp with wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, Overall: 144 7/8 x 99 in. (368 x 251.5 cm), Photo: The MET

I watched Hasbro’s iconic *My Little Pony* characters open a world of play, myth, and magic.<sup>7</sup> I have always been drawn to the relationship between the natural and the mythical. From fantasies of unicorns and the Loch Ness monster, I study creatures that operate with their own logic and exist in another world.<sup>8</sup> My practice references human projections of non-human, surreal landscapes such as *Candyland* or *World of Care Bears*.<sup>9</sup> These fantasies offer a contrast

<sup>7</sup> *My Little Pony* (1986-1987) is an American Animated television series set in *Ponyland*, a mystical home to all kinds of magical creatures.

<sup>8</sup> Mythical creature in Scottish folklore

<sup>9</sup> Designed for preschoolers, *CandyLand* is a game where players race down a rainbow-colored track to be the first one at the *King Candy Castle*.

to our daily norm by envisioning the bizarre and offering an escape from reality. When growing up in the early 2000s, I spent hours of time playing online games like *My Scene* and *Webkinz*.<sup>10 11</sup>



Fig 2.3. Ganz, Webkinz World, 2005, Virtual Plush World Photo: Lizzy Stoddard

Participating in these virtual worlds further encouraged the escape from reality into fantasy. In a world of E-pets and virtual dream houses, there was plenty of space to play and design a new world. By escaping into this space of fantasy, it helps give nuance in understanding our current reality.

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<sup>10</sup> *My Scene* (2002) is a digital website produced by Mattel where players could watch webisodes, make wallpapers, and design fashion.

<sup>11</sup> *Webkinz* (2005) is an online community by Ganz, consisting of stuffed animals that have an online playable persona. Each plush toy came with a “Secret Code” that allows user to play on the online website “Webkinz World.”



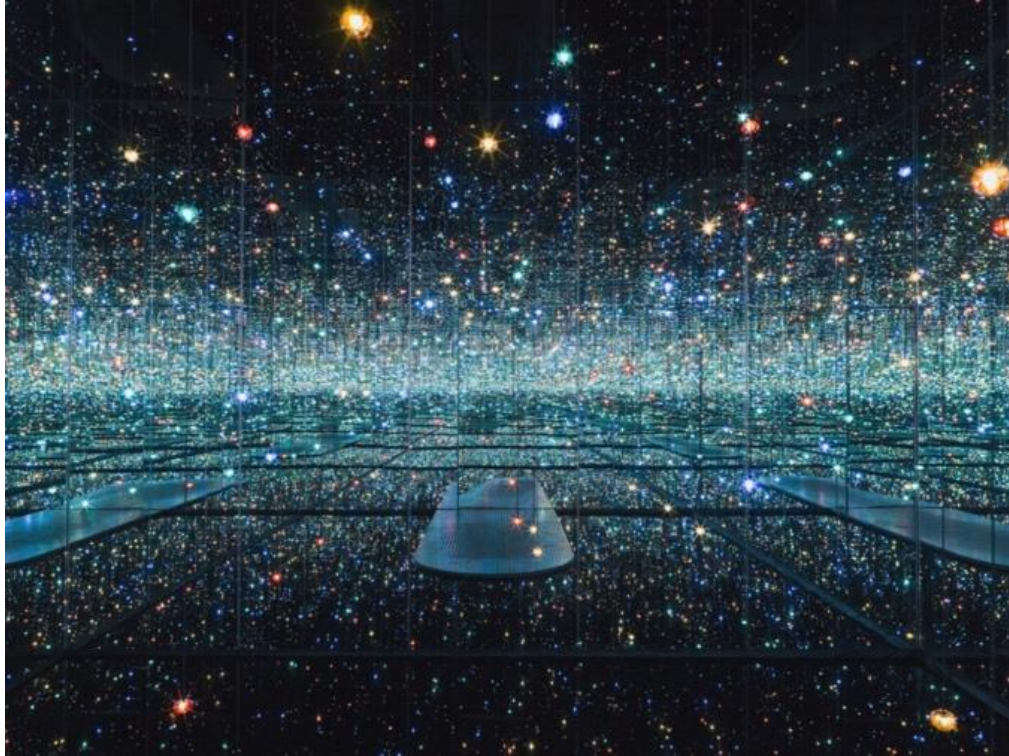


Fig 2.4. Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Mirrored Room- The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*, 2013, Wood, metal, glass mirrors, plastic, acrylic panel, rubber, LED lighting system, acrylic balls, and water, 113 ¼ x 163 ½ x 163 ½ in. Courtesy of David Zwirner, NY

In my artmaking, I considered the possibility that the mundane could be mythical as a result of my virtual, world-building experiences. As a result, I began to expand my expectations of reality and formal requirements for an artwork.

This newfound optimism for the open-ended, infinite possibility of an artwork was cemented by the visceral experience of seeing Yayoi Kusama’s *Infinity Mirrored Room—The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*.<sup>12</sup> I was only fourteen years old, and as I stared into the vast galaxy of stars, I had an out-of-body experience where the world opened, hope rushed in, and I was filled with an overwhelming feeling of wonder.

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<sup>12</sup> “Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors,” High Museum of Art, February 24, 2023.

Art began to expand beyond paper and pencil, and I was flooded with ideas to expand the gallery space into a scape for my viewers to experience this sensation. The kaleidoscopic environment gives the viewer a space to believe in the transcendence of art and life.



Fig 2.5. Leonard Knight, *The Second Salvation Mountain*, California, Photograph by Carol M. Highsmith

With Kusama's example in mind, I continued to explore inspirational examples of expansive imagination in visual art. Curiosity and wonder have been a source of inspiration for generations of visual artists. In a 1998 television interview after his exhibition at the Guggenheim, Robert Rauschenberg spoke with Charlie Rose, saying "I think curiosity is the probably the most important energy that any creative person can have."<sup>13</sup> Artist Leonard Knight embodies this creative energy and curiosity in his immersive installation, *The Second Salvation Mountain*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "JSMA Research Guide-Robert Rauschenberg," JSMA University of Oregon , accessed April 23, 2024,

<sup>14</sup> "Leonard Knight Paintings, Bio, Ideas," The Art Story, accessed March 22, 2024

Knight painted over 150-feet of the Californian desert with saturated colors and winding stripes. The all-encompassing environment with its yellow roads and whimsical trees is reminiscent of the Land of Oz and the overwhelming scale pushes viewers into an outlandish landscape that is exotic and alluring. In *Magic: Documents of Contemporary Art*, author Mark Pilkington describes this realm of weirdness in his essay “How to Believe Weird Things”. Because our imagination is constantly constructing and deconstructing long and short-term memories, the visual experience of memory is experiential and abstract. Visual art becomes a space where weirdness can dwell, expand, overwhelm, or deceive.<sup>15</sup>

Environments like *The Second Salvation Mountain* and the *Infinity Mirror Room* allow for strangeness to dwell and creates transcendent experiences to occur in ordinary. By allowing space for wonder, exploration, and making, weirdness begins to reveal itself. Through dramatic scale and atmosphere, these spaces enable an escape from reality for a moment where the individual can wonder in a new light and perceive or connect to the world in hopes for a greater sense of meaning in life. Art becomes an illusion that pushes us greater, deeper, and beyond.

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Pelkington, “How to Believe Weird Things,” in *Magic: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Jamie Sutcliffe (Whitechapel Gallery, 2021), 63–67.

## Chapter 2: Surreal World

Through the language of surrealism, there is a visual connection between personal experience and subconscious wonder. Art under the influence of surrealism is often highly imaginative, symbolic, and universal, drawing inspiration from automatic writings, dreams, and trances.<sup>16</sup> Through psychoanalysis principles influenced by Sigmund Freud, surrealist artists explored how the unconscious mind conveyed hidden desires and is a source of artistic inspiration.<sup>17</sup>



Fig 3.1. Salvador Dali, *Swans Reflecting Elephants*, 1937

As an artist searching for ways to foster space for awe, I often reference Salvador Dali's hallucinatory forms like the animal characters in his painting *Swans Reflecting Elephants*. With this painting, Dali morphs images, shades with illusory color palettes, and presents bizarre clouds

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<sup>16</sup> Beverley D'Silva, "Surrealism: How Our Strangest Dreams Come to Life in Design," BBC News, November 23, 2022

<sup>17</sup> Surrealist landscapes | MoMA, accessed March 23, 2024.



among other visual allusions that keep the viewer engaged. In 1940, Dali captured this spirit of wonder when he said “I try to create fantastic things, magical things, like in a dream. The world needs more fantasy.”<sup>18</sup>



Fig 3.2. Still from The Midnight Gospel, 2020, Photo: Netflix

As a painter, I see the canvas as a plane where I can bring together benevolent memories and ambiguous timelines. I reference personal memories from my subconscious while incorporating visuals from popular media I grew up watching. I recall specific scenes from films like *Alice in Wonderland*, where color and hallucinatory visuals would transport me into another world, or somewhere sensorial and extravagant. My fascination with popular culture and fictive universes continues through influence of animated television shows like *The Midnight Gospel*. These cartoons that are animated for adults take visual risks by pushing characters and imagery

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<sup>18</sup> Beverley D'Silva, "Surrealism: How Our Strangest Dreams Come to Life in Design," BBC News, November 23, 2022

past the cute and abnormal, into the realm of weirdness. The color combinations and energetic illustrations are wild and glisten in a way that seems to come from somewhere outside of the human.

Surrealist landscapes reflect a similar sense of uncanny and illusive imagery which create a space of indeterminate tension between dream-like and a nightmare.<sup>19</sup> The movement was born out of the desire to escape reality and allow space for a deep dive into one's own existence. In a similar way to surrealist paintings, animated art like *The Midnight Gospel* delves beyond hypnotic visuals to facilitate the escape into fantasy.



Fig 3.3. Sarah Moon, *Cosmic Melody*, 2023, Acrylic paint on canvas with spray and crystal embellishments, 8'x6', Photo: Sarah Moon

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<sup>19</sup> Surrealist landscapes | MoMA, accessed March 23, 2024,

In my painting *Cosmic Melody*, the composition extends the canvas backward through time as layers of paint reveal marks of late-night moments or carefully planned imagery. I start with yards of stretched canvas, giving space for the performative act of pouring and mixing paint and gesso directly onto the canvas. By integrating biomorphic shapes and saturated media-inspired colors, the lively layers create a hallucinatory aesthetic where scale and sense of space is distorted, and color is liquified.

When I paint, I feel like I am on a magic carpet ride through color and material. I enter a trance-like state in which intuition leads my decisions. I often reach for glistening materials like glitter, sequins, or cheap rhinestones, which I apply to the surface like magic stars. I include stars and celestial voids to convey a vast space that holds space for contemplation and wonder. The collage images I use in my paintings come from old journals and drawings I've kept for the past decade. Spray paint and other liquified materials, like gloss varnish, expand the canvas, like in *Cosmic Melody*. Light reflects off the highly pigmented canvas to draw viewers into a synthetic pop-universe.





Fig 3.4. Sarah Moon, *Wild Rumpus*, 2023, Acrylic paint on canvas with spray, 8'x8', Photo: Sarah Moon

In terms of imagery, I often reference influences that are primarily geared to a youthful audience. In my painting, *Wild Rumpus*, I illustrate iconic childhood memories, like watching Eeyore's birthday party, a moment that celebrated benevolence and care. I also reference familiar characters like the Care Bears, but they are contorted into a composition of chaos material.<sup>20</sup> I find inspiration in the imaginative universes within these simple stories. Animated nostalgic

<sup>20</sup> *Winnie the Pooh and a Day for Eeyore* (1983) is an American animated featurette based off the show *Winnie-the-Pooh*.



media like the Care Bears or contemporary tales such as *Adventure Time*<sup>21</sup> navigate large themes such as good versus evil, alternate timelines, and perception versus deception.



Fig 3.5. Sarah Moon, (Detail) *Wild Rumpus*, 2023, Acrylic paint on canvas with spray, 8'x8', Photo: Sarah Moon

Cartoons are a vehicle for imagination, play, and color, mixing genres by blending science fiction, fantasy dreams, and visual art so that weird is normal. The universes that exist in this animated media lack physical limitations so that characters can bend, twist, shrink, and change dimensions. With their unique visual aesthetic and charming power, cartoons intertwine

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<sup>21</sup> *Adventure Time* (2010) is an American fantasy animated television show set in the post-apocalyptic “Land of Ooo”

stories and shape visual art and design.<sup>22</sup> For both children and adults, cartoons are crucial in developing creative concepts and conveying moral messages.

When making the painting *Wild Rumpus*, I layered an expressive underpainting with images from my childhood including stuffed animals, birthday parties, and popular television like *Winnie the Pooh* or more specifically *Eeyore's Birthday Party*.<sup>23</sup> In this episode, Eeyore, characterized as a gloomy, stuffed donkey, believes nobody remembered his birthday, but to his surprise his friends had planned a surprise birthday party to inspire some cheer in Eeyore. *Wild Rumpus* spans eight feet and rearranges images from this anecdote into an explosion of mixed technicolor material.

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<sup>22</sup> “The Role of Vintage Cartoons in Inspiring Art and Graphic Design: Opening a Window on Creativity.” Medium, December 11, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> “Winnie the Pooh and a Day for Eeyore.1983.” YouTube, February 10, 2021.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Re7laEZVPFc>. The story tells of Eeyore, a depressed donkey who becomes saddened when he thought his friends had forgotten his birthday. “Eeyore’s Birthday” is now a unique celebration that brings together thousands of people in Austin, Texas.



Fig 3.6. Kenny Scharf, *When Worlds Collide*, 1984, Oil and acrylic spray paint on canvas, Overall: 122 5/16 x 209 5/16 in, Photo: Whitney Museum of American Art

By combining these specific media influences with the aesthetics of surrealism, I am influenced by artist Kenny Scharf. While surrealism is based in dreams and the subconscious, pop art depicts the superficial, the cute, and the mundane. Kenny Scharf's painting *When Worlds Collide* incorporates representational cartoon characters like the Kool Aid Man, celestial voids, and animated clouds. Pop-surrealism merges fantasy culture with popular social and political issues, reaching beyond the mainstream art audience.<sup>24</sup> I incorporate a more personal history into my paintings by integrating imagery from popular cartoons with collage from my personal journals. By painting with both popular and personal images, I channel nostalgia through material to evoke a similar sense of curiosity and meditation in my paintings.

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<sup>24</sup> "Pop, Street, Whatever: The Undeniable Relevance of Kenny Scharf." The Artling, October 9, 2020.



### Chapter 3: Play and Performance

According to a 1947-48 statement published in *Possibilities*, Jackson Pollock said: “When I am in my painting, I’m not aware of what I’m doing. It is only after a sort of ‘get acquainted’ period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own.”<sup>25</sup>



Fig 4.1. Sarah Moon, Process Shot of *The Land of Reverie: Convulsive Beauty, Enchanted Portal, Mystic Delight*, 2024, Photo: Sarah Moon

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<sup>25</sup> Jackson Pollock. MoMA Interactives. Retrieved April 11, 2024



When starting an underpainting, the possibilities feel limitless. My marks feel like a dialogue between my psyche and the canvas as I literally soak my socks in gesso and dance across the canvas that lines my studio floor. The dance at the beginning of each painting has turned into a ritual of sorts.



Fig 4.2. Katharina Grosse, *The Horse Trotted Another Couple of Metres, Then It Stopped*, 2018, Carriageworks, Sydney, acrylic on fabric, 1.000 x 4.600 x 1.500 cm; Soil, wood, acrylic, Styrofoam, clothing, acrylic on glass-fibre, reinforced plastic, photo: Zan Wimberley

I draw inspiration from Katarina Grosse's studio practice, which takes paint beyond the boundaries of canvas and into a world of psychedelic abstraction. She drenches compositions in fluorescent colors using a spray gun; this application method allows for a different sense of space and speed.<sup>26</sup> By using sprayed acrylic paint, she moves swiftly across the surface applying color that is fluorescent and acidic.

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<sup>26</sup> Maier, Ati. "Katharina Grosse." BOMB Magazine. Accessed March 22, 2024.



Fig 4.3. Katharina Grosse, Clip from ART21 video of artist spray painting sculptural elements for her exhibition “Just Two of Us” in 2013, 2014, Photo: Art21

The marks I make in my paintings vary: some are repetitive, intuitive, reductive, and additive and reflect a psychedelic style with exaggerated acidic colors. Colors begin to leak onto the floor and permeate the walls of my studio. By expanding the boundaries of the paint I often enter another realm where color is abundant, and time is compressed. I find inspiration in the methods of action painters who were splashing, dripping, and throwing paint onto the canvas. I often reflect influence of “automatic” techniques by embracing free play and intuition and connect to this “compulsive” and “urgent” need to paint that painter Etel Adnan describes:



“Painting is close to poetry, is a kind of poetry expressed visually. It must be spontaneous, rapid.”



Fig 3.4. Sarah Moon, *Colour Garden*, 2023, Installation Shot of mixed media painting, plaster, and spray paint on burlap, Photo: Sarah Moon

Often the paint expands beyond a canvas and onto the walls of my studio like in my installation *Colour Garden*. While making this installation, I moved around the composition to

spread color in tandem with my own physical movements by using spray-paint as an extension of my body and mind.

I dipped strips of burlap into plaster to create a textured surface that spans 180-square feet. By layering the burlap among chicken wire, I sculpted the white cube gallery into a staged landscape. By increasing scale from previous works, *Colour Garden* has an immersive quality that invites viewers to sit, explore, or dance in the open space. This material choice created gaps and pockets of light and darkness amongst a field of vibrant color. These gaps or voids in the composition, photographed in *Unholy*, become implied portals that lead the viewer beyond reality and into an alternative world.



Fig 3.5. Sarah Moon, *Unholy*, 2023, Detail photograph of Mixed Media installation, Inkjet on Paper, 24"x30" Photo: Sarah Moon

## Chapter 4: Enchanted Portal

Making large-scale paintings becomes a dreamlike act. When I enter my studio, I enter another world. I find myself covered in paint, immersed in music, and connected to my inner creative. When I am immersed in painting, I seem to go somewhere without going anywhere. In *Pictures and Tears* (2001) art historian James Elkins identifies this immersive phenomenon as the “trance theory” or the traveling theory.<sup>27</sup> When I go into the studio, I experience this trance phenomenon as I enter a state of semi-consciousness and making becomes purely intuitive. I am mesmerized by pigments of paint, mounds of glitter, and scraps of collage. When I start making, I get lost for hours, often forgetting where I am.



Fig 5.1. Sarah Moon, *Moonage Daydream*, 2023, Video Installation of liquid light show, 1:03 minutes, Photo: Sarah Moon

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<sup>27</sup> Elkins, James. *Pictures and tears: A history of people who have cried in front of paintings*. New York: Routledge, 2004.



I capture this trance-like movement in my video installation *Moonage Daydream*. The projection of a liquid paint show expanded over 15-feet. I become entranced with the interaction of my shadow with the projection, this fantasy dimension materialized in the gallery space, and I captured the dance through photography. I am absorbed into a portal of self-expression and art becomes an embodied, immersive experience.

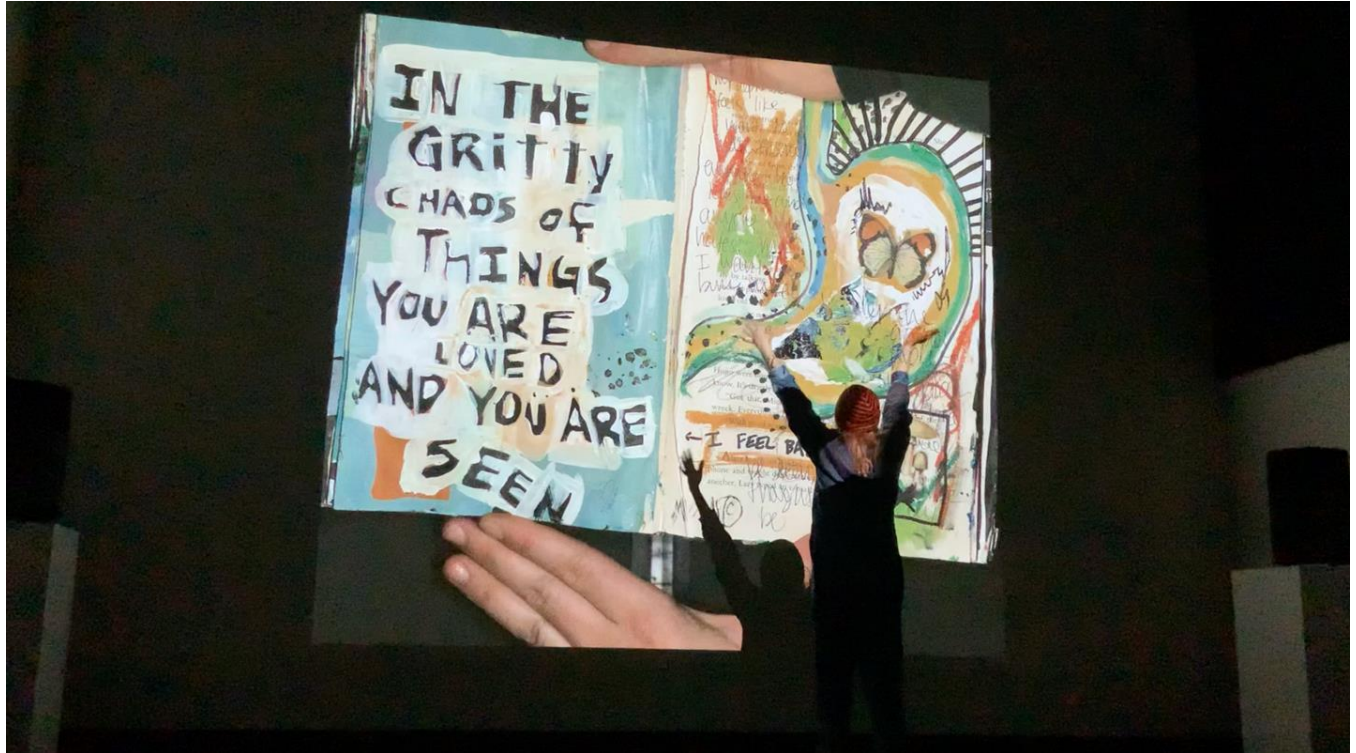


Fig 5.2. Sarah Moon, *You Can Dance If You Want To!* 2023, Time based Media performance, 2:03 minutes, Photo: Sarah Moon

Over the past decade, I have saved readings, drawings, poetry, and scraps in upcycled journals. Through accessing these personal journals years later, art becomes a portal into my past imagination. In my performance piece *You Can Dance If You Want To!* by projecting my personal journals large scale in the gallery, my personal thoughts and drawings were exposed and sped through to mirror the ephemerality of time and memory.



Fig 5.3. Pipilotti Rist, Installation View of *Pixel Forest* and *Worry Will Vanish*, 2017, courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Photo: The Storyhive

When making this video, I referenced Pipilotti Rist's media installation, *Worry Will Vanish*.<sup>28</sup> This captivating environment allows viewers space and time for introspection. Viewers are invited to recline on pillows and are given space to wonder. The installation is made up of thousands of hanging LED lights while a video projection takes viewers on a dream like journey through a landscape, the human psyche, and the heavens. When I am looking at this installation, I am given the space to wonder and soon am flooded with dreams of dazzling colors. With two-channel video projections, Rist expands the gallery beyond its walls and distorts the scale of the gallery to make the audience feel small in the best way possible. Under a vast sky of synthetic stars, *Worry Will Vanish* inspires a sense of humility and awe at the enormity of the universe.

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<sup>28</sup> "Pipilotti Rist: Worry Will Vanish," Hauser & Wirth, accessed March 22, 2024,





Fig 5.4. Sarah Moon, *One Wild and Precious Life*, 2024, Acrylic Paint with collage material, glitter, gold leaf, 54"x54", Photo: Sarah Moon

I began to visually explore where I go when I enter into this trance-like state. In my *One Wild and Precious Life*, I introduce a visual portal with an open circle shape to create a tunneling effect of material and imagery. The surface is adorned with plastic craft crystals and gold leaf, which historically has represented the heavens or an otherworldly light. I shift scale from a macro to micro level, referencing the cosmos, the heavens, and the creatures of the land to fully encompass the abundant possibilities of this other world. By using symbols of the otherworldly, I



draw inspiration from artists like Hieronymus Bosch whose symbolic visual language explores darker aspects of human nature while pushing the boundaries of imagination and curiosity.<sup>29 30</sup>

My largest painting, *The Land of Reverie*, combines abstracted shapes with realistic dancers, animals, and majestic unicorns to convey being lost in a daydream of one's own.



Fig 5.5. Sarah Moon, *The Land of Reverie: Convulsive Beauty, Enchanted Portal, and Mystic Delight*, 2024, Acrylic Paint, oil pastel, collage material, spray paint, rhinestones, plastic dome 8'x18', Photo: Sarah Moon

The entire painting spans 18- feet and is divided into three panels. From a distance, the composition begins to blur into a mass of collage and color. I depict deep ocean creatures, the mountainous terrain of *Salvation Mountain*, cosmic bubbles, UFOs, and a majestic unicorn drinking from the stream. The winding roads connect each panel together, showing a panoramic snapshot of a fantasy world. By combining all these idyllic symbols onto a blank canvas, art constructs my unconscious dreams into a glittering reality. I connect with the language of

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<sup>29</sup> Hieronymus Bosh (b. 1450) Known for his most complex painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1500). He is considered one of the greatest artists of the Northern Renaissance with restlessly imaginative works rich in religious symbolism, allegory, and fantastical elements depicted in bustling scenes across expansive compositions.

<sup>30</sup> Selvin, Claire. "Hieronymus Bosch: A Mysterious Master's Early Life and Major Works." ARTnews.com, April 29, 2020.



surrealism as a way to translate these unconscious dreams through material and into a new piece of magic.



Fig 5.6. Sarah Moon, (Detail) *The Land of Reverie: Enchanted Portal*, 2024, Acrylic Paint, oil pastel, collage material, spray paint, rhinestones, plastic dome 8'x18', Photo: Sarah Moon

Moments of magic can be found while meandering through layers of collage and ornamentation. Up close, the surface quality becomes textured, reflects light, and contains layers

of time and decisions. I see these reflections of light and layers of time as a manifestation of wonder in my work.

Wassily Kandinsky once said that “An empty canvas is a living wonder...Far lovelier than certain pictures.”<sup>31</sup> After rolling out yards of raw canvas to start my painting *The Land of Reverie*, I let the blankness fill with visions of color, chaos, the cosmos, and *Candyland*.<sup>32</sup> The empty canvas becomes a physical plane for world building, escape, and wonder.

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<sup>31</sup> “Wassily Kandinsky Quotes,” Wassily Kandinsky, accessed May 1, 2024,

<sup>32</sup> The game Candyland, which invites players to explore a peppermint stick forest, a peanut brittle house, a molasses swamp, and a gumdrop mountain, was designed to foster imagination and individual play, rather than encourage competition.

## Conclusion

As an artist who builds worlds out of color and mixed media painting methods, I believe these kaleidoscopic environments give viewers a space to think about the transcendence of art and imagination. I use paint, video, and canvas as a playground for my subconscious thoughts to frolic amongst dreams of Pop-culture cartoons and personal memories. When we were children, creativity was abundant: Play-Doh, blanket forts, mythical creatures, and fantasy books drove our reality.<sup>33</sup> At some point, we stopped playing, started working, and let our experiences and delusions dictate our reality. We stopped playing because we felt that to be successful, we needed to be realistic.

There is a certain trauma that comes with this modern existence; through the embodiment of material, art allows us to appreciate our humanity. Trusting our subconscious can sometimes lead to extraordinary magic. I use art to metabolize emotions, tap into my unconscious, and manage a harsh reality through retrospective imaginative thought.

The canvas becomes a portal into a world where limitations dissolve, boundaries are fluid, shapes contort and morph, and reality is a malleable construct. The blank canvas creates a space to play freely, connect with my subconscious, and paint my own reality. I wonder what this “enchanted portal” would look like if I pushed the canvas beyond a stretched square, and out into the physical world. I plan to bridge the gap between my time-based media videos and my paintings to build a world within the gallery. By making otherworldly objects and paintings, I can provide a place for viewers to connect with their humanity and embrace this wild journey.

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<sup>33</sup> Play-Doh (1956) is a modeling clay for young children to make arts and crafts projects. Originally only available in white, Play-Doh soon expanded in a wide variety of hues and colors.

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