Satan's Beach Surf Them Webs 666

Shawn Burkard
shawnburkard@wustl.edu

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Satan’s Beach:
Surf Them Webs
666

Shawn Burkard

A Thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts of Washington University in St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art

Program Director
Patricia Olynyk

Graduate Committee
Thesis Advisor | Monika Weiss

Primary Advisors
Lisa Bulawski | Jessica Baran

Committee Members
Michael Byron | Dr. Mark Rollins
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Abstract

It is crucial in today’s world to embrace technology, which is an essential component of our daily lives. It makes communication in our lives easier. Technology serves a variety of functions that help in the development of education, business, communication, and scientific research. The freedom it offers through social media platforms allows for personal connections at a global level to become feasible. Although the Internet provides ease of communication at a large scale, it is bound to have issues that pollute the intended connections. Virus, spam mail and cyberbullies are some of the items that contribute to it becoming a hostile environment. My most recent work delves into issues of technology, visibility, and personal expression. I explore the topic of pseudo-modernism. As described by Alan Kirby, there is a new standard of knowledge based on new technology and social platforms that define the pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon.

*Satan’s Beach* is a series of paintings, photographs, and sculpture that come from an imaginary place. It is a dystopian environment inspired by the Internet that builds on the concept of subculture banality and mystical aura. Through creative writing and the other physical pieces, I attempt to give life to a nonexistent place through art.
Introduction

Figure 1

Satan’s Beach

Come, surf Satan’s webs—the spilling of abundance, the waves crashing on the shore. Satan’s Beach—the lost, legendary utopian ditch; the epic “Lost Party”; “the sinister source of creativity”; the max beyond the maximum. Its topography reveals crustaceous hard surfaces carved by centuries of being whipped by the ocean. Lava and oil spills, a hot spot for overindulgent sunbathers on the sand. Gravel pits for those who relish in self-destruction. It is known as the destination for competition under extreme conditions. It’s radical! Gestural marks deliberate pleasure and disturbance. Everything happens in life and painting. Feel the adrenaline! Just do it! Here there are no consequences for the greedy lepers with Titus complex, ready to take the bombs.

Summon the number of the beast; be utterly amazed and confused by fear, anger, and joy. It’s a battle for who’s the worst! Get to know the locals, go back to the valley. They’ll break your
face. Home to the rich and the beautiful. You won’t be happy, but you’ll look good. Meet the “lord,” the legend, the Big G at the fountain. Take in the flora and fauna. Feast your eyes on the beauty of the atmospheric aerosol skies. Catch some stray rays and fade away into the haze.

Endless activities for everyone await here, all included. Lounge in the sizzling disco Septic Liquid at the center of the world. DJ Whirlpool uses cannons, sunup to sundown, supercharged and superfun, unlike anything else ever experienced. Dive headfirst into the gallows below! Spontaneous island spirits have mystical visions in sewer vernacular. Unlimited eternal adventures are just a voodoo paddle away. Saltwater fire, seaweed, and sand massages for open wounds. Satisfaction.

Everything you can possibly imagine is beachside—surfin’ and sun’n Satan’s webs. The Y vibes are totalitarian contagiousness, and before long, you’ll lose yourself. Go six feet under in a Ga fish coffin, push the limitless earth on 666 miles of pure paradise. Here you will never be faced with The Dwindle.

Watch for The Dharma Bummer—a real drag—hitchhiking consciousness-probing Master of Reality. The path of least resistance can be found within the northeast winds.

*Worldwide Slaytanic Webs.*

Satan invites you: Come get away for a long time, meet interesting people, relax. It’s all risk, it’s all pleasure, and it’s all pain. Sometimes you can have everything your heart desires, except for the way it used to be.
Satan’s Beach is a place that I invented as a construct and inspiration to make art. It exists in tangible products like paintings, sculpture, writing, and photography. It is informed by our current cultural practices such as shopping and searching the Internet via mobile devices and on social media platforms.

Satan’s Beach is a satire of the notion that the Internet is a utopian free space. The Internet is not a real place; it does not have physical dimensions. Utopia literally translates from the Greek meaning “no place”. The Internet is nonexistent yet we flock to it. Satan’s Beach is nonexistent, and I want people to flock to it. While on the surface it is based in fun, with an apocalyptic vernacular, it is also an exploration of language. It is composed of all the commercial lures present in television, movies, and the Internet, and the desire to escape reality. Its culture is developed around appropriated Internet jargon and puns, mixed with surfer slang. It is a place
that I made up, stranded between two worlds. One is the world of film where caricature
development is sourced from movies like *Endless Summer*, *Point Break*, and *Fast Times at
Ridgemont High*, and the second is sourced from the technological culture of Silicon Valley.
These two worlds coalesce, making a self-absorbed world filled with narcissism and fictional
inhabitants—the *Twitter tiki freaks* and *beach trolls*—who run rampant, compromising the free
space by making it bad and nasty but equally enticing and lame.

![Figure 3](image)

This modality of work was inspired by a question that emerged during research: What
artistic period are we in? What defines *now*? I know we are past modernism, postmodernism, and
post postmodernism, so I wanted to know where today’s artistic practices currently stand. During
my research, I found an essay by Alan Kirby that made an impression on me. In his writing,
Kirby states that postmodernism is dead and is no longer a reflection of our time. What he
explains is that we live in a time of “pseudo-modernism,” a cultural and social reshaping of authority and knowledge formed under the pressure of contemporary social platforms and technologies. This means that the use of the Internet gives power of authorship to anyone.

This pseudo-modern world, so frightening and seemingly uncontrollable, inevitably feeds a desire to return to the infantile playing with toys which also characterizes the pseudo-modern cultural world. Here, the typical emotional state, radically superseding the hyper-consciousness of irony, is the trance – the state of being swallowed up by your activity. In place of the neurosis of modernism and the narcissism of postmodernism, pseudo-modernism takes the world away, by creating a new weightless nowhere of silent autism. You click, you punch the keys, you are ‘involved’, engulfed, deciding. You are the text, there is no-one else, no ‘author’; there is nowhere else, no other time or place. You are free: you are the text: the text is superseded.¹

I was struck by two things when I read this passage: The older models of -isms have transitioned from being represented in physical form to an immaterial form, and Kirby’s position seems to be negative. He is saying that people are so addicted to having a constant online presence that they are unaware of how their constant commentary affects others. I do not see the Internet in a wholly negative way; however, I do find it entertaining from a creative point to view it as a hell. I do not fully subscribe to the concept Kirby offers, but I do agree with him on how being online is all-consuming and that the real person is now best represented on a screen.

Other inspiring takes from Kirby’s passage were the terminologies used to describe this pseudo-modern world. It is a “frightening and seemingly uncontrollable” place introducing a “trance – the state of being swallowed up by your activity … [that] takes the world away …. You are involved, engulfed … there is no-one else, no ‘author’; there is nowhere else.” All these conjure up the idea that this place is something like a Lord of the Flies cyber tribe. My imagination ran wild with these phrases. Kirby’s world seemed so hellish, with people engulfed by virtual flames, so wild and uncontrollable that everything is fair game, anything goes, whether or not you follow along with it. Chances are, as Kirby describes it, it will suck you in.
To support my idea of the Internet as hell, I will share a real-world example from early 2016. Pop star Justin Bieber deleted his Instagram account because his fans were unrelentingly negative in their comments of his posts. He stated that he was staying away from the network out of “holy concern,” declaring that:

Instagram is for the devil. I think hell is Instagram. I’m 90 percent sure. We get sent to hell, we get locked in the Instagram server.²

I like the idea Bieber is expressing, that a portion of his existence and soul, which he willfully shared, is now trapped in a digital purgatory where it can never be retrieved. He is skeptical of the devotion of his fans because of their abusive behavior online, affecting him on an emotional and spiritual level. The matrix of the Internet has declared ownership of a portion of Bieber’s soul. I am interested in this type of dichotomy between the virtual world and the spiritual world.

This story has a direct relation to Kirby’s description of pseudo-modernism. Bieber’s thoughts and feelings echo Kirby’s “being swallowed up by your activity”, “takes the world away,” and being “engulfed” by the digital sphere. Kirby could have been suggesting that people are using the Internet to get lost within their own activity, with the physical world dissolving around them. Bieber feels that part of his life has been taken from him by the Internet, swallowed up in a kind of hell. Bieber’s real identity is superseded by the negative text in the comments field, where he has lost ownership of himself, rendering part of his soul forever trapped in an Instagram server.

I relate to this idea of the Internet as a demonic entity, as it suggests that social media platforms have the capacity to betray and deceive us into thinking they are safe places to interact. In the end, Bieber found that his shared online life was treacherous with unpredictable dangers.
The Internet offers everyone freedom to be anybody, and it is this form of seeking attention that traps them.

My work is not about being opposed to the use of technology. On the contrary, I think the Internet is useful and entertaining. I use it every day for practical reasons such as shopping, emailing, and browsing as well as checking up on my social media accounts. *Satan’s Beach* highlights peoples’ use of the Internet and commentary as a subject for art. My artistic goals for *Satan’s Beach* is that it takes on a life of its own, beyond simply referencing to the Internet.
Trance

Figure 4

My diptych Trance, 60” x 54”, 2016 (fig. 4), builds on Kirby’s idea that being online engulfs you. The works consists of two individual text paintings that are made with spray paint and enamel on canvas. The three words surfing, searching, and shopping are hand-painted with flat black Rust-Oleum enamel paint over a flamingo pink and turquoise polka-dot pattern sprayed through a stencil onto a white background. The paintings repeat the three words that describe what I do most on my cell phone. I find similarities between online searching and meditation because I can be in the zone, capable of losing awareness in the midst of either
activity. The text is to be read like the cadence of a mantra, as the three words line up side by side with unbroken continuity in the manner of water, making it mesmerizing and disorienting. Without compositional structure, spacing, or color variations, the words bunched together become bewildering. Each row of words bleeds off the edges of the canvas, implying a continuum of the chant. There is no center or depth, and all the letters are flat and of the same size in order to reference a computer or mobile device screen.
The most common behavior I have observed of people in both public and private is looking down at a screen. I see the act of looking down at a screen as a reduction, as if we are shrinking our physical presence to fit an online presence, one where we are now best represented through images and text. We are morphing and trading places from our real bodies to our virtual representations.

The installation *Dwindle* 2016 (fig. 5), part of the *Satan’s Beach* series, explores the reduction process of our bodies into virtual text. The viewer enters a long narrow gallery space that has been completely evacuated of human presence and is a metaphor for an Ethernet cable.

The gallery space is populated with paintings from *Trance* 2016, a burnt wooden surfboard, a fieldstone quartz stone, and an image appropriated from a surf publication. On the gallery walls, paintings lean against the walls at 60 inches high and 54 inches wide so that the
viewer is equal to the works’ scale. The paintings lean against the walls, instead of being hung, to mimic floor-length mirrors in a clothing store, with text replacing the reflection of the body.

The idea of placing the viewer inside an Ethernet cable is essential because the cable form is tubular, and we as users travel through the Internet by way of cables and Wi-Fi signals. A tube is also a type of wave where the surfer is well inside the curve of a breaking wave, making it tubular, like a conduit that houses cables. The viewer entering the space simulates surfing the Internet; they are inside the tube like the surfer in the wave or inside the Ethernet cable where the text is like the water of the ocean. I am trying to give life to the Ethernet cable as a byproduct of the Internet. It attempts to provide a life to a place that does not have a physical presence.

At the end of the corridor, a burnt wooden surfboard (fig. 6), with its blackened, charred surface, evokes the presence of the possible user. The blackness of the surface acts as a positive and a negative channel; its darkness is rich and deep. I imagine the viewer falling into the black portal, transporting him or her from the real space to a virtual space. The board is a doorway and one that I hope attracts the viewer to get fully immersed through the sculpture. Also, if the Internet were a type of hell or purgatory, surfing the Internet would burn since there is nothing but fire in hell. Next to the burnt surfboard is the quartz stone that embodies the presence of what remains of the earth. In Japanese rock gardens, rocks symbolize the presence of mountains or of living creatures. I use the quartz because it provides life. It represents the materials that are extracted from the earth to be used as parts for our technological devices. The stone is quartz, which is a semiconductive mineral used in the manufacturing process of motherboards. The quartz is a conductor for the copper wiring that enables our devices to work.
The black and white photo (fig. 6) is an image that I scanned from a surf magazine of a surfer in mid-flight, up above a large breaking wave, flying into the void of the ocean. This represents the interchange of the physical body leaping into the void of the nonphysical realm of the Internet, symbolized by the ocean. The image gives rise to an aura of a once-present human body. This is a reflection of our hyperconnected, postmodern era based on the online presence mirroring the physical presence.

There are two aspirations that are essential to Satan’s Beach: one is the idea of aura, or life, and the other is the lack of connection between the viewer and object. Preferably, the objects hold the aura of the place, which engenders the feeling of absence. In “The Photographic
Activity of Postmodernism,” Douglas Crimp talks about the idea of aura and lack of presence as “being necessitated by performance to that kind of presence that is possible only through the absence that we know to be the condition of representation.” He continues by using a quote by the author Henry James: “The presence before him was a presence.” Crimp explains:

I want to add a third definition to the word presence. To the notion of presence which is about being there, being in front of, and the notion that Henry James uses in his ghost stories, the presence which is a ghost and therefore really absence, the presence which is not there, I want to add the notion of presence as a kind of increment of being there, a ghost aspect of presence that is its excess, its supplement.

Using this idea of a ghost presence, my work acts to illustrate a place but mainly as an apparition, without direct reference to a physical object or place; its existence is dependent on the aura and whatever spirit the viewer brings to the space. The creed of Satan’s Beach is fun and is a subversion of dominant popular culture driven by the commercial industry and advertising directed at suburbanites with a metaphysical approach. For example, being the master of your destiny is synonymous with paying your bills; dreaming is good for the soul is synonymous with having good credit. My work, from a satirical perspective, looks at how practical solutions are offered to us to help solve abstract concepts like destiny, dreaming, and life’s purpose.

Role Play

Another way aura is created is through role play. The role of the surfer is an integral component of Satan’s Beach, as the cosmology of the place is within him. As part of the process, I embody a surfer who is possessed by Satan. This provides a frame of reference for the state of mind and for the style and the attitude toward the paintings and sculptures inspired by this environment. I do surf two months out of the year; however, I long to be doing it every day. Taking on the role allows me to understand the particular point of view I am interpreting through
the work. I think that it helps make the work believable. This gives life to the work. The surfer is
the painter and object maker in Satan’s Beach, the beachcomber and documenter of the place.
The reason why I choose to work this way is because I give up control of what and how I make
work in the studio; I get into the mind of the character and envision his environment. I get to
have a different type of engagement with what is being produced in my studio rather than
coming from my personal perspective.
Here is an example of how I incorporate role-playing in my process of making art:

In *Surf Webs 666* 2015 (fig. 7), I use spray paint, oil, and graphite on a prefabricated store-bought canvas to make a painting that is to be read as a type of sign instead of pictorial. With a tube of oil paint, I scrawled directly on the surface with haphazard paint splatters and markings all around, without the interference of brush or stencil.

The appropriated words *surf* and *webs* have double meanings, allowing me to evoke a mental scene through the text without relying on an image. The painting mocks the language of
surfing the Internet being fast, as though it is a type of a total rush experience, as extreme sports are advertised. The hand-painted typeface is reminiscent of graffiti seen on concrete walls in underpasses or hangout spots near a beach. The scrawl marks signify human touch, the evidence that someone was there. The handwriting is the antithesis of how humans are represented through digital text today.

The prefabricated canvas is essential to the work as an overall signifier of our flat culture. Everything is becoming push-button easy, with our culture preferring the ease of premade purchases over crafting. The prefabricated canvases allow me to make irrational and rushed decisions in painting because I can simply buy another one.

In a further analysis of Surf Webs 666, our culture is dependent on speed and how fast Internet connections are. Slow Internet connections would inhibit people from interacting with the cyberworld. I am interested in how cellphone provider companies use the words fast and slow in advertisements to manipulate consumers into thinking of themselves and their social status based on their Internet speed connections. I am also thinking about the words fast and slow in relation to being an insider versus outsider within the social and cultural context of technology.

Satan

I like talking about Satan in my work because the initial effect on the viewer is off-putting. The topic of Satan is a cliché taboo in art, viewed as unsophisticated and anti-intellectual. There is still a stigma today that fuels superstitions about satanic symbols, which are linked to believing in the Antichrist. Since the fall of religion, Satan has become a free agent with little to do these days, so my intention is to resurrect Satan in the spirit of parody. I use Satan as a satirical critique of our technological culture, which is heavily based on materialistic
agendas rooted in capitalism, providing dark humor that is simultaneously moral. The Satan in my work represents online culture vices predicated on narcissistic values.

Satan is linked to self-interest and the autonomy of the individual. In today’s culture, we publicly exhibit traits like deviance, pride, free will, and ambition, often time shamelessly flaunting them online. Satan represents human primal urges, beings indulged online. Sexual desires can be met instantaneously via the ease of creating false identities to entice followers, among other means. I use Satan as a cultural symbol that represents our current state of self-satisfaction, image obsession, access to strangers’ information, and the surveillance of others. An example of this is the TV and social media personality Tomi Lahren, who is the voice and image of the far-right wing of the conservative political media. She uses her platform to blatantly promote racism and bigotry, such as the comparison of the Black Lives Matter campaign to a new KKK. The more she uses her platforms and projects her ideologies, the more these values become normalized. As these ideologies are piped in through Ethernet cables and Wi-Fi connections and filtered out through our screens, they start to be standard views of the public.
Appropriation and Nonappropriation

Mike Kelley

Figure 8. Mike Kelley’s Tijuana Hayride 2005.

In Satan’s Beach, I use appropriated language and images, similar to what Mike Kelley did in Day Is Done 2005. In it, Kelley appropriated photographs as source material for character development for his melodrama musical. Day Is Done is an installation work compiled of thirty-two separate video chapters where each video is a live action reproduction of an appropriated photograph from high school yearbooks. The images are depictions of students participating in plays, themed dress-up days, holiday festivities, and dances. The people in the photographs are acting outside of a social normative activity. For example, the work from the production Tijuana Hayride (fig. 8) consists of two photographs: the black and white image on the left is found imagery, and the color photograph to the right is a production still from Day Is Done. The person in the photograph on the left is acting in a play, a parody on a country hick. Kelley’s
reproduction on the right is an exaggeration of a southern hick to offer commentary on how class status is viewed in America. Kelley examines the failures of his working-class upbringing. What I like about this is that Kelley has to come up with a story line based off the information that is provided in the image. I am not working with found imagery in the piece Trance but using appropriated text as a means to allow me to make up a world from two words. The words I use, one could argue, are not found words but a part of our everyday culture. Kelley explores the absurdities of stereotypes and how they seep into the consciousness of the masses.

I use appropriated words from the Internet to be able to talk about cultural shifts. For example, when I use the word surf, it is in the context of technology, as in surfing the Internet, but the way I depict it is through a parody of surfboarding culture. The person that scrawled the paint on the canvas is a character, a surfer who is about to catch rad waves, hitting websites, visiting locations with the keyboard, mouse, or thumb. Webs have shifted from nature; the webs spun by a spider have dematerialized. Search engines are the ones that spin the most webs these days.

Dash Snow

Although my canvases have a certain careless, low-tech quality to them similar to some of Dash Snow’s work, I do want to address what my work is not about nor be mistaken with bad boy behavior because my text paintings do have the visual appearance of scribbled hand styles of certain types of tagging found in the genre of graffiti. Dash Snow’s work is informed by drug addiction and the documentation of his personal drug use. His work is about debauchery and excess and is dead set on self-deprecating anarchy. My work is about world-making and attempts to highlight people’s cultural and social presence online.
My work is not personal, where in Snow’s, it is. In *I Forgot More Than You Will Ever Know* (fig. 9), the text was made with a lighter burnt into the substrate and has the appearance that it was made while cooking heroin. The message takes an elitist stance and reads as if it were some type of profound statement, with the attitude of an angry adolescent that has some more growing up to do. The message in the work talks down to the viewer, and it exhibits an elitist perspective that comes across too self-assured. The work has all the stylistic tropes of burnout-style graffiti, which is the life the artist lived, but the irony with his persona is that it is a manufactured one. Snow was born into wealth as his mother was an heiress to the Schlumberger oil fortune and also a major art collector. Snow made a conscious choice to live a rebellious lifestyle that had a certain type of image because he could afford to. My intentions with *Satan’s Beach* is not to glorify drug use nor is it dependent on the sensationalized artist personality, and it definitely does not evoke death. It is about our current cultural state and search for meaning in life.
Boredom

I started this body of work inspired by boredom. I tend to make work that is symmetrical with hard edges and high polish. I had the desire to lose control, to be deceptive and perilous. I found myself bored with the idea of art comprised of painting and sculpture. I am interested in exploring how ordinary objects function.

Figure 10

A work of mine that demonstrates a transformative process is *Drumsticks* 2017, 11" x 3" x 32 oz. (fig. 10), which consists of two cartoon-style hand-built ceramic bones fired in a matte white glaze that are dipped into cups of two different flavors, sour apple and berry cherry, of a Freezoni, which is a frozen drink, similar to a slushy, made by QuikTrip. The sculpture popsicles are set into paper BBQ rib plates with checkerboard-print restaurant wax paper. The Styrofoam cup acts as a mold, and the freezing process is similar to the curing processes of concrete or plaster. Once out of the cup, the work is temporal as being set in room temperature begins the melting process. *Drumsticks* blurs the line between common object and art object. The Freezoni
is not an art material but, frozen solid like ceramics, allows it to become an art object.

*Drumsticks* 2017 demonstrates the ghost presence as it becomes the type of item that exists in the cosmology of *Satan’s Beach.*
Life’s a Beach

After a couple of days examining boredom, a number of thoughts came to me: Why don’t I make work about the navigation language on websites, or about “shopping” and “surfing”? Why not make a painting that reflects how I use a cell phone or tablet? I realized that these were the same things everyone else does when they’re bored, and I came to the conclusion that everyone is bored. A global phenomenon occurs across cultures and continents: Everyone is handling their boredom through using the same devices, all on the same Internet pipeline, surfing the web. Using the same type of technology and feeding it more data unifies us. I recognized that online searching is akin to the devotional ritual act of searching for something from “beyond” or seeking guidance to find meaning within the present time. So I began thinking about how I could represent what I just described through materials. I sought to make work based on an apocalyptic drive to have fun. I wanted to take my boredom and art straight to hell and have fun with it.

I started to play a mind-mapping game. I asked myself two questions: How could I make something as ubiquitous as the Internet? and Where would I rather be? I’d rather be at the beach, surfing and listening to music. Beaches are typically advertised as “the ultimate getaway,” an escape from our daily lives and largely dependent on the notion of pleasure. This implies that pleasure is found elsewhere or through a purchase and not within oneself. The beach and the Internet are both locations for pleasure; the grains of sand are the binary code of zeros and ones in infinite space. I am really attracted to the language used in the Internet as well as the relaxed language and slang that is used in both surf and skateboard cultures; blended together, both languages speak a dialect that seems to come from the same place. What is ironic is that the Internet was created in California, as was American surf culture.
The novelist Walker Percy gives an example of this symbolic complex in describing how we experience the Grand Canyon:

Why is it almost impossible to gaze directly at the Grand Canyon under these circumstances and see it for what it is—as one picks up a strange object from one’s backyard and gazes directly at it? It is almost impossible because the Grand Canyon, the thing that it is, has been appropriated by the symbolic complex, which has already been formed in the sightseer’s mind. Seeing the canyon under approved circumstances is seeing the symbolic complex head on. The thing is no longer the thing as it confronted the Spaniard: it is rather that which has already been formulated—by a picture postcard, geography book, tourist folders, and the words then self-result in this pre-formulation.²

According to Walter Benjamin, an artwork’s aura is lost when it is no longer uniquely crafted but reproduced; he wrote, “One might subsume the eliminated element in the term ‘aura’ that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction.”³ Benjamin was talking about photography and film, but I want to apply his idea of aura to the current representation. Digital cameras and pictures are very much a part of our everyday lives.

After 1996, the word “web” has never been the same as it’s now more closely associated with technology than something found in nature. So if I’m talking about “surfing webs,” various images come to mind for the viewer. In my mind, it’s a demon surfing an ocean made up of webs, when in fact the phrase is describing something extremely domestic: someone sitting at a computer browsing the Internet. Language is a way for me to work with and reconfigure the different modalities of the dominant culture.
The novel *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko (fig. 11) is about a half-blood Laguna Indian, Tayo, who suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder after surviving the Bataan Death March of WWII. At his lowest point, Tayo struggles with the notion that to live a life of the Indian means to live a life of destitution and hopelessness, but he wants to find a way out of this shroud of darkness or out of the *white smoke*, so he strives to regain his health and his heritage through the only natural way he knows how, which is through a ceremony.

The book illustrates Tayo’s journey of reclaiming both his heritage and his identity as a Pueblo Indian. He archives this by responding to visions and callings that appear to him through intuitive feelings and dreams that lead him to different shamans.

This book is related to my studio practice in the topic of the shaman (fig. 12). I believe that artists are the shamans of contemporary times, and the strength of the artist’s work, or ceremony, is dependent on how up to date the artist is with current life and world experiences.
When I am making my work, I feel that I insert a spirit into the work. Art is shedding light on a subject; like the shaman, I, the artist, am giving life to *something*. The act of creation for me is synonymous to the chant of the shaman. If I am making a painting, or installing a pile of found objects that make a sculpture, I am communicating something, giving something spirit, a life to share with others. In my opinion, it is up to the viewers to decide if they are interested in participating in the ceremony of the artwork. I believe art can raise awareness about issues, which can start a discussion, which may, in turn, get people to think differently.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Figure 12*

Another reason *Ceremony* inspires my art is my interest in the character called *Thought Woman*, the spider who weaves her web of stories. In Laguna Pueblo mythology, *Thought Woman* is attributed to the creation of the universe, where she created the world as she thought of it and beings came to be as she thought of them.
Here is the story of *Thought Woman*:

Ts' its' ts'i' nako, Thought-Woman, is sitting in her room and whatever she thinks about appears. She thought of her sisters, Nau' ts' ity' i and I' tcs' i, and together they created the Universe this world and the four worlds below. Thought-Woman, the spider, named things and as she named them they appeared. She is sitting in her room thinking of a story now I’m telling you the story she is thinking.

I found this Pueblo Indian myth to have similarities with how we use the Internet. I think about how beautiful the concept is of the woman sitting in her room thinking of stories and how she’s the spider weaving those stories into a web. Then I think about the earth and its advanced technological web and how people share their stories and images, whether they are real or made up, mainly with mobile devices. I think about how we upload our stories to this larger entity of the web, growing and expanding them into endless space. Then I think about how artificial it is; as it’s not a real place, the Internet operates similar to a myth in that it’s part truth and part fiction. It happens in real time and also archives time. I think about how we exist in both worlds and at different times.

This mind map of thoughts represents how I made my own world through the source material of the Internet’s term of it being a *web*. I want *Satan’s Beach* to be able to critique culture and at the same time be able to separate itself from meaning, where it can have a life of its own.
Bo Diddley

Figure 13

I am holding a copy of Bo Diddley’s (fig. 13) second album titled *GO Bo Diddley*; the “go” is printed in green font and “Bo Diddley” is printed in red font. The cover art is a photograph of him looking dapper with a black bow tie; red, yellow, and black checkered suit jacket; and a white shirt. He is holding a red Gretsch guitar, and behind him in the photo are two band members out of focus: Jerome Green and drummer Clifton James. Its chipboard cover is ragged, worn, and torn with scotch type stain marks that used to keep the two halves of the album cover together. I like it this way because it has character and shows history of use.
The back of the album cover reads, “As in his fist long-play effort, he’s written all the songs, sings them and contributes the distinctive guitar sound that is the very soul of Bo Diddley.” That sentence alone inspires me and makes me want to produce art in much the same vain as Diddley, by way of making something my own. The most inspiring part of the liner notes for me is:

Bo’s experimented with sounds. He has even invented a special guitar, used for the first time on this record. And, for the first time, there are two instrumentals, featuring the “Bo Beat” and the “Diddley” guitar all the way through.

The reason why I like this narrative about Diddley’s guitars is that he wanted a particular sound that couldn’t be achieved with the technologies he had on hand in 1959. He used his resourcefulness and intuition to find a way to make the sound he wanted for his album. I keep Diddley’s narrative in mind when I think about making my own work, especially when I am making work from Satan’s Beach, a world I am creating that influences the work being made.

These were not guitar kits that he would assemble; he made his own guitars that would, in turn, become his distinct sound. He started with his homemade guitars made from cigar boxes, which is an old folk, afro-Cuban tradition, that later would give rise to his signature instrument (fig. 14) and its distinctive rectangular shape. From what I understand, he had made two dozen handmade guitars in his lifetime and played them in his recording sessions and performances. I found an interview where he was asked about his personal interest in building his own guitars and which guitar he started with; here is what he had to say about his process:

The square guitar. I made one when I was a teenager; its pickup was the part of a Victrola record player where the needle went in. I clamped it to the metal tailpiece to pick up the vibrations. I wasn’t able to buy electric guitars back then, so I built them, and they worked pretty good. Somebody stole the square guitar I built, but in 1958 Gretsch made me one with DeArmond pickups. They only made one authorized square guitar, but I’ve
seen other unauthorized models out there. I’m not sure how that happened; maybe it had something to do with the times when the Gretsch company was closed up.¹⁰

*Figure 14*
He approached designers at guitar manufacture Gretsch Guitars, who would go on to produce his customized square-bodied guitars based off his handmade cigar box guitars. The guitar company went on to make Diddley’s signature square-bodied guitar as well as two Jupiter Thunderbird guitars under Diddley’s direction.
Diddley was an artist who knew himself. He knew he wanted a unique sound and sought a way to produce it from items he could find around the house, knowing he could create the sound himself. This example shows my idea of artist as shaman; Diddley had the foresight and the ear to discover the sound he wanted for his guitar and, more importantly, for the creation of his music. He was immersed in his craft, living and breathing his art.
Conclusion

*Satan’s Beach* has been criticized for being angsty and garish because of its appearances. One of its criticisms is that it was viewed as a middle finger to the viewer, which it is not. Like I mentioned before, using Satan in art has an anti-intellectual component that is hard to escape. Satanic imagery has been used in pop culture, such as in rock ‘n’ roll and heavy metal. I come from a working-class family and grew up listening and collecting music and being in bands of these genres. Oftentimes, rock ‘n’ roll, heavy metal, and punk can be intellectual, using its platform to criticize current culture and social norms. I thought that I would draw from my personal history, interests, and experiences to help inform my new body of work.

It also presents questions on the motives for making artwork that is appealing. What does it mean to make a painting that people like? Who do you make a painting for? Is it for me to like, or is it for someone else to like? What does it mean to make work that people do not like? Is there prejudice at play? It serves a purpose to delve into what it means for me to make art. Previously my intentions had always been to make work that was appealing at first sight. Currently I am interested in going beyond what is appealing and easily liked, taking chances and exploring the possibility of making viewers uneasy.

Another criticism of *Satan’s Beach* is that it does not resemble the Internet. Everything I used and made in this series is in analog form instead of digital. Since there is no use of technology or screens, viewers have a hard time connecting with the subject matter and the symbolism presented. My paintings are not literal representations of computers or their screens, so it faces the challenge of interpretation. I am using language as the way in which the Internet is perceived socially and culturally. To be online, we have to connect by typing commands and words in search engines to take us somewhere on the Internet. Search engines represent us as
individuals and our moral standing. Text and words are integral to our culture today, and it challenges the conventions of knowledge, truth, and time.

This new series of work is not looking to answer or solve any issue that I pose for myself as an artist or onto the audience. Instead, I hope that it will start a conversation and, as the series progresses, that it develops a body of its own that is not connected to the Internet.
Endnotes


4. Crimp, “Photographic Activity.”


9. Diddley, Go Bo Diddley, liner notes.

Bibliography


Plates

Fig. 4
Shawn Burkard

*Trance* diptych – October 2016
Part of *Dwindle* installation in the safe space
Fig. 5

Shawn Burkard

*Dwindle* (installation view) – October 2016

Installation in the safe space
Fig. 6

Shawn Burkard

_Dwindle_ (installation view) – October 2016

Installation in the safe space
Fig. 7
Shawn Burkard
*Surf Webs 666* – 2016
20" x 16"
Oil and spray paint on canvas
Fig. 10
Shawn Burkard
*Drumsticks* – 2017
Ceramic and frozen slushies
Various size
Fig. 11
Leslie Marmon Silko
*Ceremony*
Novel
Illustrations

Fig. 1. Appropriated screen shot from film *Morning of the Earth*. By Alby Falzon and David Elfick. 1971.

Fig. 2. Appropriated screen shot from film *Morning of the Earth*. By Alby Falzon and David Elfick. 1971.

Fig. 3. Appropriated screen shot from film *Morning of the Earth*. By Alby Falzon and David Elfick. 1971.

Fig. 4. Burkard, Shawn. *Trance*. Enamel and spray paint on canvas, 60" x 54". 2016.

Fig. 5. Burkard, Shawn. *Dwindle*: installation, painting, surfboard, quartz, photo. 2016.

Fig. 6. Burkard, Shawn. *Dwindle*: installation detail, surfboard with photo. 2016.

Fig. 7. Burkard, Shawn. *Surf Webs 666*. Oil and spray paint on canvas, 20" x 16". 2015.


Fig. 10. Burkard, Shawn. *Drumsticks*. Ceramic and frozen slushies, 11" x 3" x 32 oz. 2017.


Fig. 12. Silko, *Ceremony*. From Shawn Burkard Collection.

Fig. 13. Bo Diddley. *Go Bo Diddley*. Checker. 1959. From Shawn Burkard Collection.


Fig. 15. Bo Diddley. Image of him with his hand-built guitars. https://uniqueguitar.blogspot.com/2015/06/bo-diddly-guitars.html

Fig. 16. Bo Diddley. Image of Bo Diddley with his Jupitar Thunderbird Cadillac guitar. https://www.edroman.com/guitars/abstract/cadillac.html