



megan warkentin

# PLAYING WITH FIRE

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Megan Warkentin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

In

Painting

Department of Art and Design

University of Alberta

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## Artist Statement

This body of work began initially with my interest in YouTube videos of people performing dangerous stunts and often hurting themselves in the process. Why would a person knowingly put their health and safety, or even their lives at risk without necessity and seemingly little to gain, and how do others (viewers) react to this behaviour? I feel guilt when watching these performances, but I am interested in the relationship between the performer and the viewer, which seem to evoke a kind of a sick pleasure for both sides. This type of behaviour is in many ways uniquely contemporary as many people would not engage in these behaviours without an audience, and with modern technology finding an audience has never been easier.

Although I am exploring a contemporary phenomena related to recent social media trends, the subject matter of my work is also linked both stylistically and thematically to an older tradition of Expressionism in painting through how I present the world from a subjective perspective, distorting it in order to express the meaning of emotional experience rather than physical reality. The themes in my work also have links to literary works such as Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Particularly relevant is the idea that contrary to logic, people do not always act in their own best interests, and that suffering can be enjoyable, particularly when you're conscious of it, and it can be enjoyable to cause others to suffer as well. Suffering and consciousness are linked, man will never give up suffering, and will purposely cause himself pain to prove that he's free to do so since man needs to be conscious to have his free will.

My goal as a painter is to create works that are striking and compelling both in form and subject matter, affecting viewers emotionally and leaving space for contemplation. With these goals in mind, ambiguity plays an essential role in my work. My paintings are narrative and cinematic - like one image cut from a film, they engage the imagination of the viewer who then completes the picture as a site of synthesis or resolution. In many of the works, I am portraying the tension of the moment when something horrible is about to happen. In some, it is unclear if the figures are willing participants in an event, or they are trapped in a violent and tragic situation from which they cannot escape. This taps into contemporary anxiety; no matter what choices we might make, we could still end up in a horrible situation beyond our control as the result of poor choices by others, or by simple bad luck.



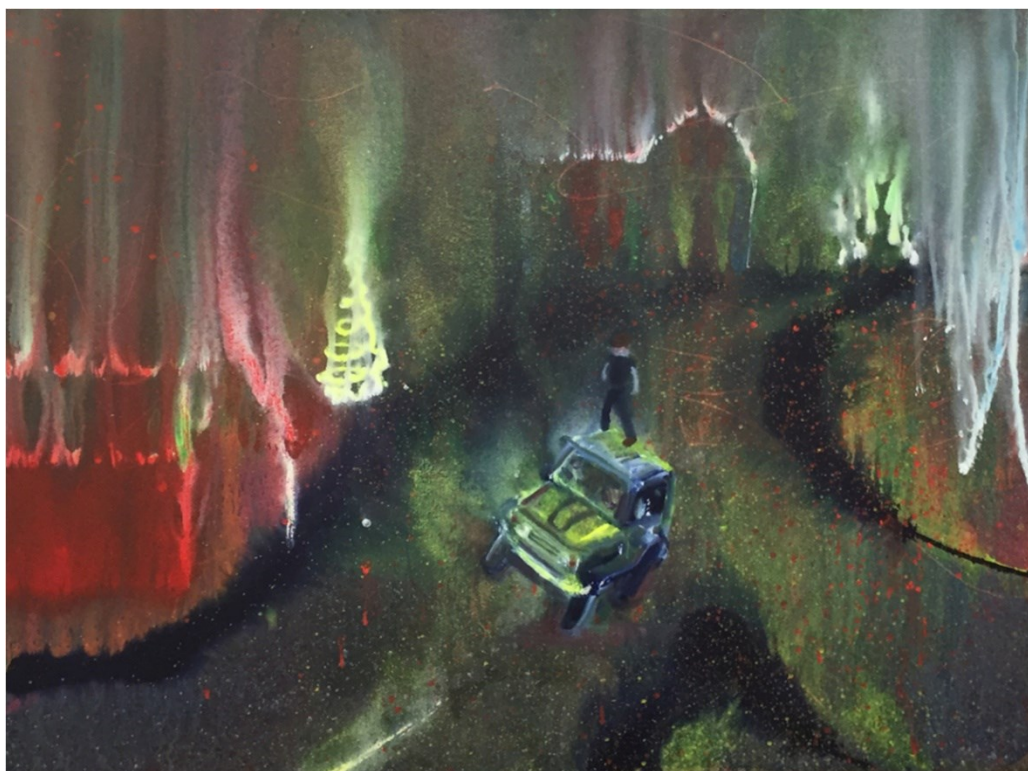
warkentin\_001 *Installation Shot*



warkentin\_002 *Installation Shot*



warkentin\_003 **A Misunderstanding** 2016 oil and acrylic on canvas, 3ft x 4ft



warkentin\_004 **Trip** 2016 acrylic on canvas, 2ft x 3ft



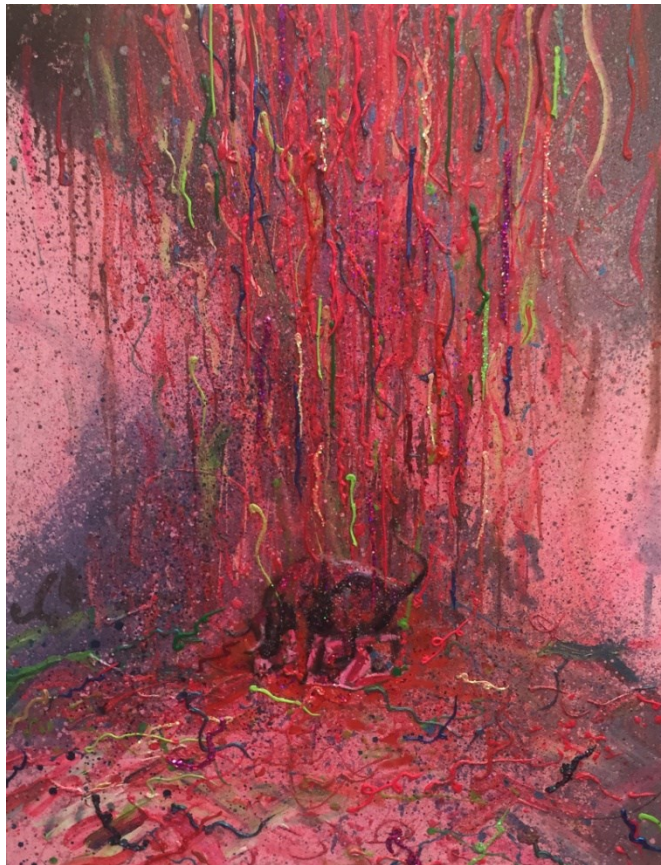
warkentin\_005 **Rolling** 2015 oil and acrylic on canvas



warkentin\_006 **Voyeur** 2016 oil and acrylic on canvas 4ft x 5ft



warkentin\_007 *Installation Shot*



warkentin\_008 **Celebration** 2016 acrylic on canvas 4ft x 5ft



warkentin\_009 *Installation Shot*



warkentin\_010 **Inferno** 2016 oil and acrylic on canvas 8.25ft x 6.25ft





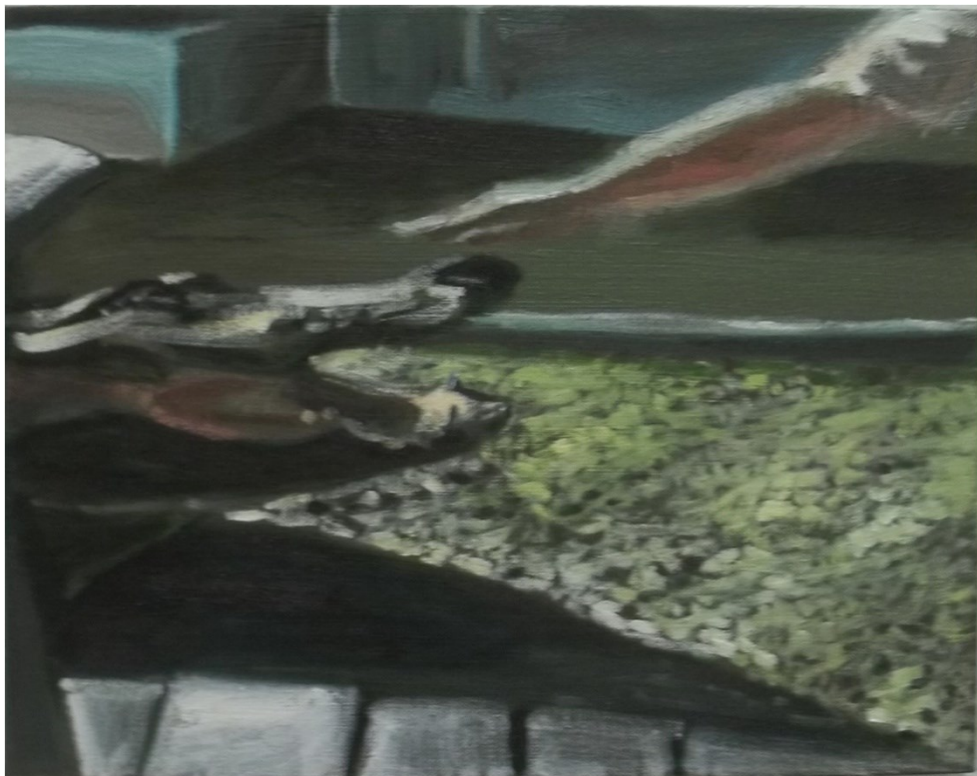
warkentin\_011 **Dare** 2015 oil and acrylic on canvas 3ft x 4ft



warkentin\_012 *Installation Shot*



warkentin\_013 **Horde** 2015 oil and acrylic on canvas 2ft x 2.5ft



warkentin\_014 **New Friend** 2015 oil and acrylic on canvas 14in x 11in



warkentin\_015 **Monster** 2016 oil and acrylic on canvas 5.5ft x 7.5ft



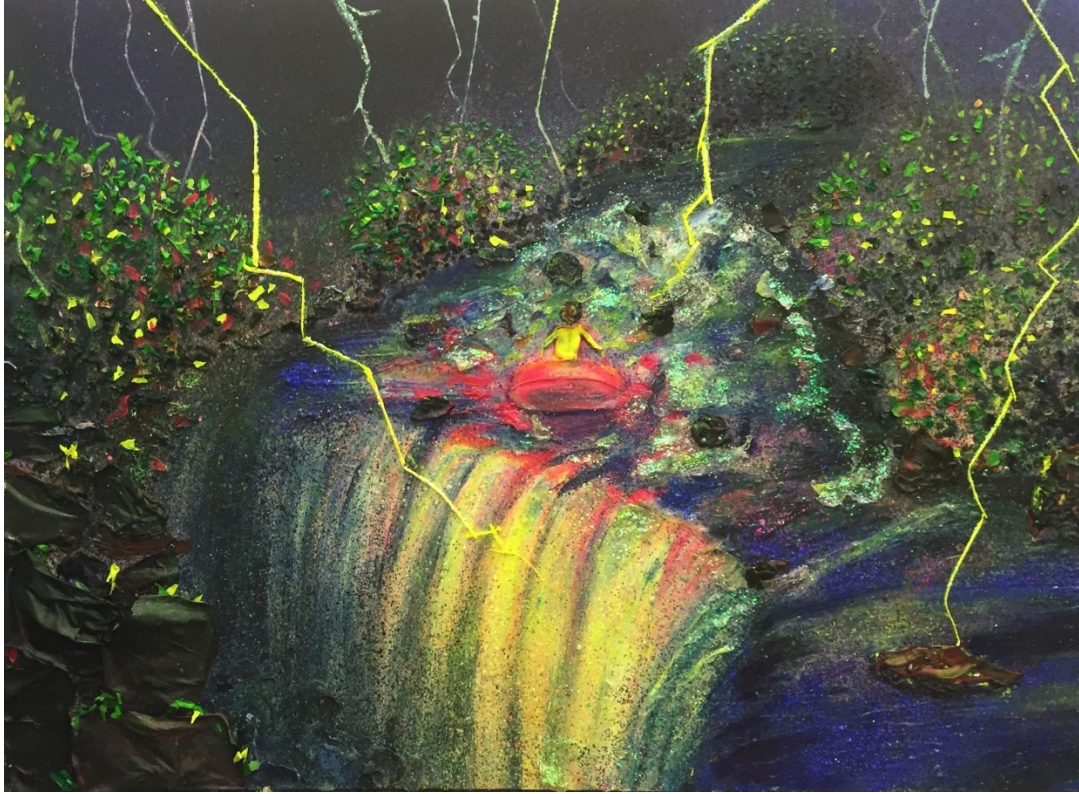
warkentin\_016 **Oblique** 2015 oil and acrylic on canvas 2ft x 3ft



warkentin\_017 **Oblivion** 2016 acrylic on canvas 5ft x 8ft



warkentin\_018 *Installation Shot*



warkentin\_019 **Falls** 2016 oil and acrylic on canvas 5.5ft x 7.5ft



warkentin\_020 **Legendary** 2015 oil and acrylic on canvas 5ft x 6ft



warkentin\_021 Nine More Seconds 2016 oil and acrylic on canvas 4ft x 5ft

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mewarken@ualberta.ca