



ADAM SLUSAR | MFA PAINTING

# NEUROMANTIC

**NEUROMANTIC**

---

Adam Slusar

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

**NEUROMANTIC** | Adam Slusar  
MFA Statement

In the book *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning*, author Bradd Shore writes about Martin Heidegger's notion of enframing – the essence of modern technology – and the “neuromantic frame of mind”. This term is used to describe the human tendency to bend technological resources to our own will<sup>1</sup>; as we harness these resources as a means of modifying and enriching our day-to-day lives, Heidegger argues that some “greater essence” is lost in the process. Shore uses the example of the modern-day word processor<sup>2</sup>, which allows for grammar proficiency and limitless language resources, as an example of this neuromantic way of thinking. Computer software, which requires continuous upgrading, is another example of how modern technology underlines our human need for convenience. Although we have access to a plethora of knowledge at our fingertips, we therefore lose other means of worldly engagement as previous modes of gaining experience are rendered obsolete.

Born at the end of the 20th century, I have always found myself drawn to media which predate my own existence. Growing up at the dawn of the Internet Age has shaped my engagement with past and present forms of popular culture, and I became fascinated with ideas of memory and nostalgia, and how these sensations become increasingly subjective as the digital world becomes more widespread and all-encompassing. One of my most profound memories involves watching 1980s MTV music videos at a young age; seeing British New Wave artists such as Boy George, Human League and the Pet Shop Boys had a lifelong effect on me as it challenged my preconceived notions about masculine identity, and gave me a unique viewpoint as someone who was never alive in Britain during the 1980s. This takes me back to the Heideggerian notion of a “lost essence” and how our vision of the past can be perceived or modified through the lens of modern technology.

Through painting, I am interested in looking into the past as well as exploring the notion of anachronism – or an error in chronology – and displacement of oneself from present-day circumstances. This theme of displacement relates to escapism, a term dating back to the 1930s used to describe fictional narrative trends that came to prominence during the Great Depression. Much like religious ideology, which posits the notion of life after death, escapism holds a similar function in that it perpetuates the notion of a better tomorrow, or what Ernst Bloch would have referred to as *utopia*. Bloch also believed that it was important to recognize the past as a means of moving towards the future<sup>3</sup>, and this is a sentiment that is echoed in the retroactive quality of my paintings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bradd Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1996), 143.

<sup>2</sup> Shore, *Culture in Mind*, 144.

<sup>3</sup> “The Principle of Hope Introduction” *Marxists.org*, accessed April 27, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bloch/hope/introduction.htm>

*Film noir* is a cinematic visual style with ties to escapist literature (i.e. detective fiction) and my paintings utilize the visual language of *noir* to address similar themes of destabilization and sexual tension. As *noir* rose to prominence during the Second World War, it presented the world from the viewpoint of an upended and disenfranchised privileged class<sup>4</sup>, a reversal of conventional gender dynamics exemplified by the *femme fatale*, and a European flair attributed to German expressionism by way of set design and the migration of European directors into Hollywood during the War<sup>5</sup>. By using abstract architecture and heavy visual contrast to convey ideas of entrapment, social division and psychological space, I am putting forward the notion that patriarchal systems of belief within society are constructed upon a teetering artifice; the products of a bygone era, predicated on fears of vulnerability and the threat of emasculation.

In addition to representations of masculinity and gender in popular culture, my paintings also correlate to notions of heroism in the context of movements such as abstract expressionism in art. Jackson Pollock, for example, presents an interesting case study whereby painting is re-contextualized it as a hyper-masculine<sup>6</sup> and nationalistic art form with the aid of art critics such as Clement Greenberg. For abstract expressionists such as Pollock, there is an intriguing dichotomy between his personal struggles and his public persona, and this is also a recurring theme in my work, represented by the male archetypes who wear suits as an outward veneer of self-confidence. Elements of abstract expressionism, such as Russian Suprematism, are also placed alongside other modes of representation within my paintings as a means of unifying these art forms within a single space, thereby running contrary to the Modernist notion of viewing art forms within an established hierarchy.

My paintings have a narrative element in the sense that I use symbolism, references to popular culture, and figures that are staged within expressionistic allegorical spaces. These spaces are visualized as a stage or film set in order to evoke a sense of cinematic storytelling, and the architecture is often exaggerated as a means of conveying an otherworldly realm that exists outside of our world. These paintings use symbols to communicate themes such as destabilization, escapism, and social progress while also maintaining a sense of abstraction and ambiguity within the picture plane. Figures are added in order to add a human component to the work, furthering the overall narrative quality of the paintings. Contrasting notions of progress, ambition, and desire with disconnection and anachronism, my work is about how we construct and engage with our reality.

---

<sup>4</sup> William Luhr, *Film Noir* (UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Luhr, *Film Noir*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Shirley Kaneda, "Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine" in *Painting*, ed. Terry R. Myers. (UK: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2011), 78.

## Bibliography

Kaneda, Shirley. "Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine." In *Painting*, edited by Terry R. Myers, 72-80. UK: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2011.

Luhr, William. *Film Noir*. UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012.

*Marxists.org*. "The Principle of Hope Introduction." Accessed April 27, 2016.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bloch/hope/introduction.htm>

Shore, Bradd. *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning*. USA: Oxford University Press, 1996.

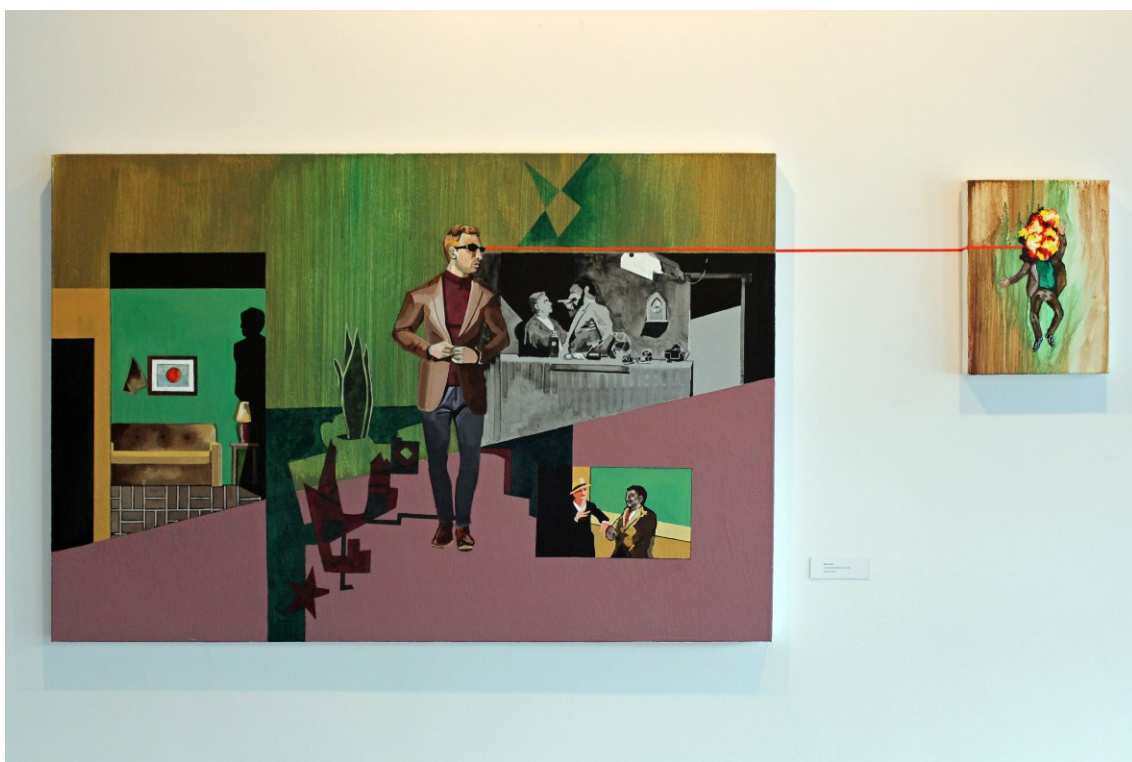


1 Slusar\_001 Wall drawings (detail)





2 Slusar\_002 It Took Seconds of Your Time (installation shot)



3 Slusar\_003 It Took Seconds of Your Time 2014 acrylic on canvas, 60 x 40; 12 x 16 inches

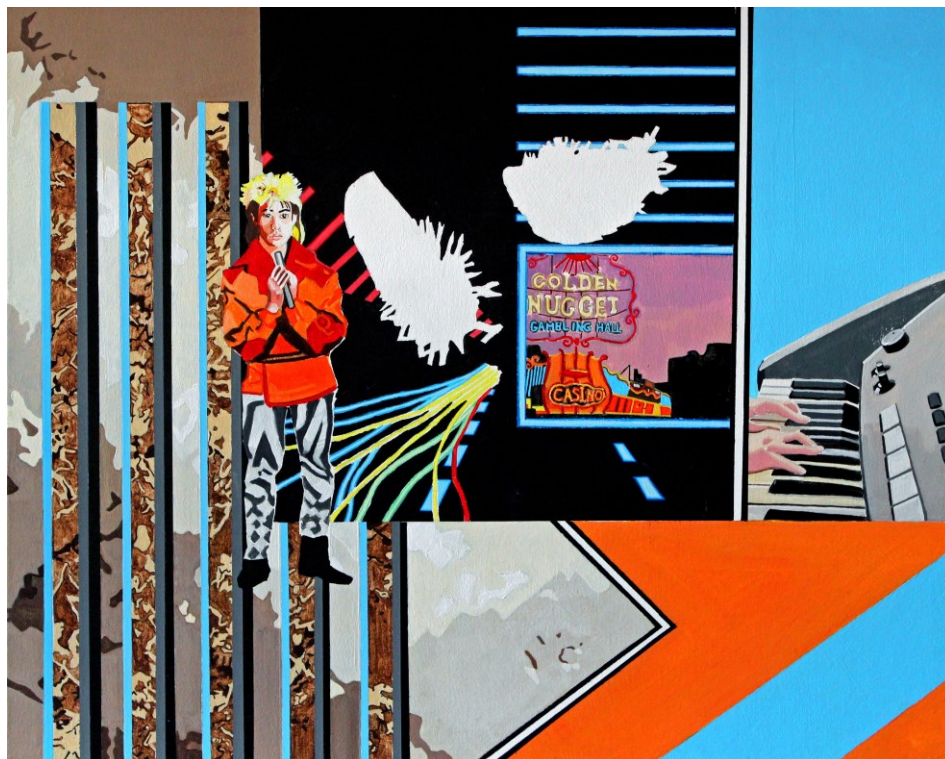


4 Slusar\_004 Installation shot



5 Slusar\_005 Reaganomics: Looking Up at the Moon 2015 acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48 inches





6 Slusar\_006 Limahl 2016 acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches



7 Slusar\_007 Neil & Chris 2015 acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches





8 Slusar\_008 Bagged & Tagged 2015 acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48 inches



9 Slusar\_009 Installation shot



10 Slusar\_010 Wall drawings





11 Slusar\_011 Simon 2015 acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches



12 Slusar\_012 David B. 2016 acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches





13 Slusar\_013 David B. & Pink Dance Club (installation shot)



14 Slusar\_014 Pink Dance Club 2014 acrylic on canvas, 63 x 25.5 inches



15 Slusar\_015 Red Wine: Iceland House 2015 acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48 inches



16 Slusar\_016 David S. Tango Mori & Red Wine: Iceland House (installation shot)





17 Slusar\_017 Tango Mori 2016 acrylic on canvas, 60 x 40 inches





18 Slusar\_018 Martin 2015 acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches

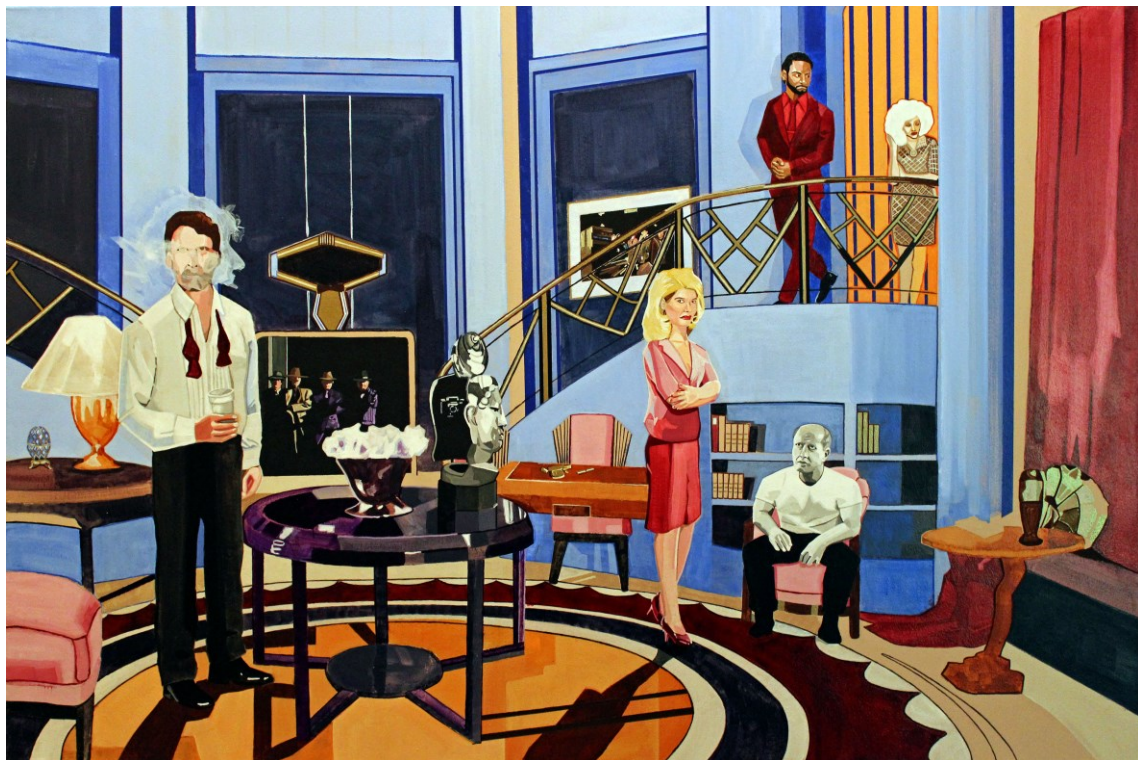


19 Slusar\_019 David S. 2016 acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches





20 Slusar\_020 Martin & Club Nocturne: Between Two Worlds (installation shot)



21 Slusar\_021 Club Nocturne: Between Two Worlds 2016 acrylic on canvas, 60 x 40 inches

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my advisors Allen Ball and Jesse Thomas for their guidance, assistance, and insight throughout my studies. I would also like to thank my MFA committee: Sean Caulfield, Steven Harris, and Sean Gouglas.

Thank you to Scott Cumberland, Paul Bernhardt, Kim Sala, Daryl Rydman, Gillian Willans, Dick Der, and to the entire University of Alberta Painting Department for your help and support, and for the many learning opportunities you provided.

Thank you to Blair Brennan and Julie-Ann Mercer of FAB Gallery, and to Sue Colberg for her technical support with the show invites and lettering. I would also like to thank Dawn McLean, Caitlin Wells, Cezary Gajewski, Stan Szykowski, and the University of Alberta Art and Design administration team.

Thank you to Misa Nikolic, Noemi de Brujin, Adrian Emberly, Emmanuel Osahor, Daniel Harvey, Stephanie Jonsson, and to all of my friends and colleagues within the University of Alberta.

Thank you to Julian Forrest, Buzz Spector, and Todd Janes for taking the time to visit my studio and engaging me with your thoughts and observations.

Thank you to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for your tremendous support and generosity.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my family and friends who have encouraged me in my pursuit of an arts education, and who helped make this exhibition possible. Thank you to my parents Bruce and Donna Slusar, my brothers Alex and Andrew, my grandparents John and Mary Slusar, and to my long-time friends Kat Matlock, Aren Bergstrom, Alexander Bucsis and Jordy Richard.

adam.omega77@gmail.com