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### Scenes from a Crash

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SCENES FROM A CRASH

by

Byron J. Anway

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Aaron Holz

Lincoln, Nebraska

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## SCENES FROM A CRASH

Byron James Anway, MFA

University of Nebraska, 2011

Adviser: Aaron J. Holz

In the summer of 2010, a drunk driver veered off the road, colliding with my house. Car parts, both recognizable and unidentifiable, littered the lawn: twisted metal, plastic, bits of industrial insulation, and fluids leaked from the engine, leaving large swaths of dead grass. The rubble provided rich subject matter from which to make work. *Scenes from a Crash* is a series of drawings and paintings made about my surroundings. This show sheds prior conventions and reevaluates assumptions about palette, scale, and medium.

My painting practice involves following intuitive impulses; I allow my internal dialogue to highlight people, places, and events from which to make paintings. I come from a military family. From that background I learned to quickly understand and adapt to new surroundings and people. There is a close connection between the strategies that I employed as a child to understand my new home, school, people, and the decisions I make in choosing subjects and sources.

Although the motivation behind my work has been fairly clear, the medium in which I worked began to stifle me. For instance, my palette was initially developed through watercolor, using pigments needed to paint figures in a representational world. When making increasingly complex images I was greatly hindered by watercolors' inability to achieve variation and depth within the darker colors. Oils are capable of subtler shifts within these dark areas and retain vibrancy when layered or applied in an opaque fashion. Oil paint has allowed me a fresh and more complex way of thinking about image-making possibilities.

As a result of my shift to oil painting, I have found new and unforeseen strategies for dealing with a painting's structure after the initial process has started. Now I scrape, sand, wipe out, and paint over sections that are not working. These are editing techniques

previously unavailable in watercolor, a medium with no reverse. These techniques have led to new possibilities in how a painting is built. My scale was also largely determined by the conventions of my watercolor practice. With all of these new tools for eliminating missteps, I can work at a much larger scale with the knowledge that I can go back. It would seem now that any painting, regardless of its size, has more potential to be resolved.

“Art is two things: a search for a road and a search for freedom. It’s very hard to get freedom” (Alice Neel in Stiles, 214.) My previous paintings are recorded in my mind like tattoos, building and filling my thoughts, or like clothing and furniture from one’s childhood cluttering an attic or basement, not leaving space for a fresh start. My oil painting practice has allowed me the freedom to cut ties with the successes, failures, and assumptions of my earlier paintings, to follow impulses and emotional leads of the moment as the driving forces behind a painting’s inception regardless of my previously-employed techniques. Part of this freedom includes a permission to play representation against abstraction, to reconsider the language of my marks. I can give up the burden of my previous work, freeing my future choices about picture making.

This freedom has changed the types of paintings I am capable of producing. I have begun to piece compositions together more like a puzzle. I can now make much larger paintings, giving up the safety net of a smaller scale, in the comfort that I can go back and rework. I do not have to figure out the entire painting before I begin. The paintings become an internal and physical process of construction, in contrast to the step-by-step and ordered process of execution I previously employed. My watercolors were tied to the source material from which they came. The oils contain pentimenti, or traces of previous actions, and are driven by problem solving. My paintings live in the balance between the emotional and the technical; now they are objects that can be wrestled into solutions.

**Sources:**

Stiles, Kristen and Peter Selz. Theories and documents of contemporary art: a sourcebook of artists’ writings. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.