



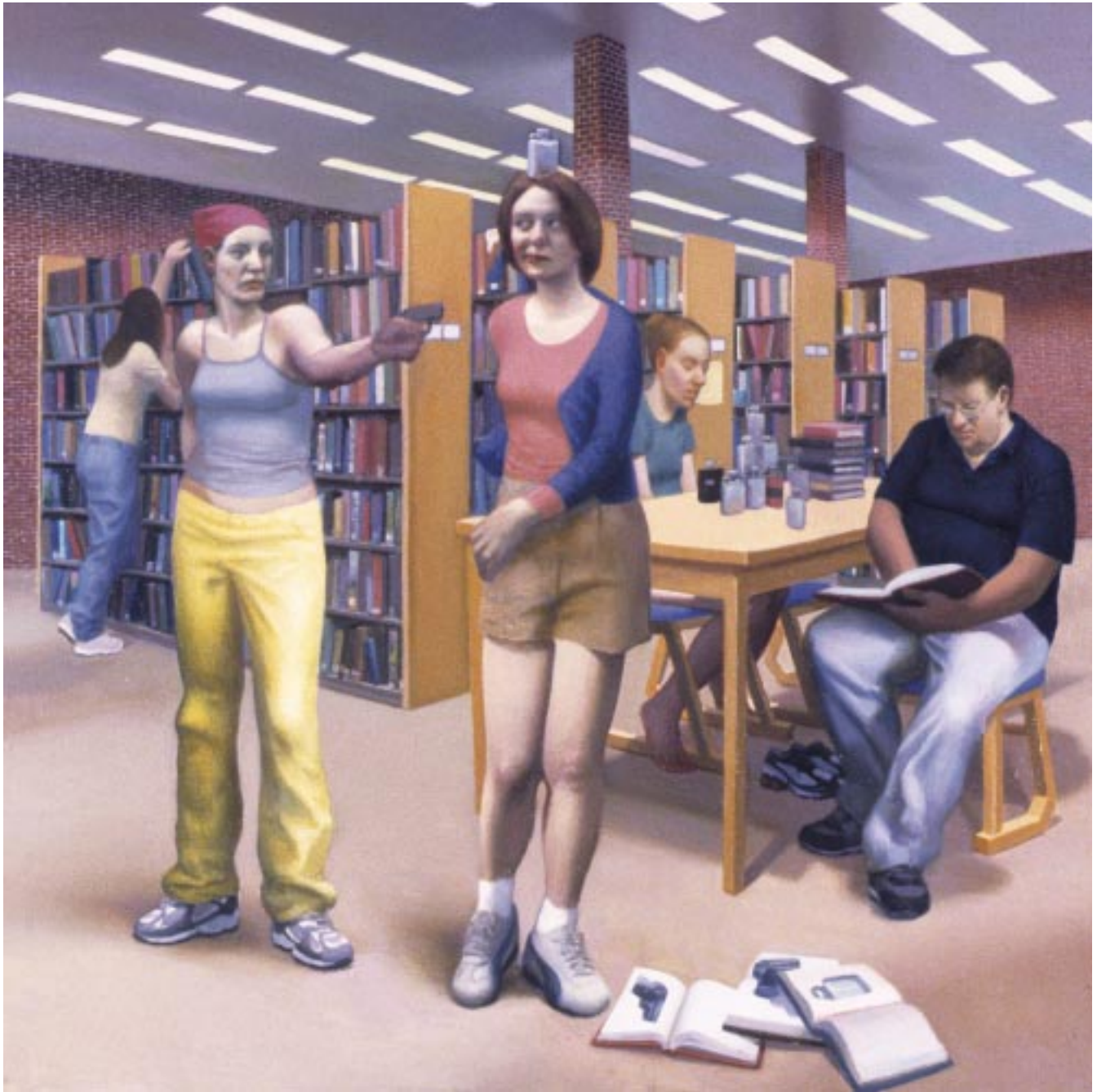
Specimens Oil on canvas 20" x 31"

Robert McCann

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My painting ideas are heavily influenced by current events and entertainment. I'm interested in the ambiguous area between action and violence, in loading images with comic and tragic themes. I'm not critiquing movies or video games, but I think there's an existing visual language there. Anything could happen within four corners, but built on some kind of logic. My paintings have increasingly reached for broader metaphor and folklore to try to compete with the amped-up news cycle. It's hard to be too absurd when the country's leading fantasists are heads of state.

In my recent work I'm playing with representations of death—of monsters—wanting to use them as a modern mythology. These horror characters have a familiar back story I can build on. Zombies seem to always represent loss of control or loss of the self. Ghost stories have been about loneliness, desire, and introspection. Ghosts also might stand in for mystery and the unknown in a more general sense—the public believes in them to a degree comparable to a religious character like the devil.



The Old Branch of the New Library Oil on panel 16" x 17"

This painting was described in my sketchbook as "Wild West Library". I thought those cutaway books with flasks and derringers (like in that old Dean Martin western) were more a part of the American consciousness than they turned out to be. This one doesn't make sense to anybody.



Inventing the Wheel Oil on panel 44" x 78"



Fear Factor vs. Cops pencil on paper 28" x 43"

I was flipping around the channels late one night and came to a scene of another fellow in a recliner having a beer. The police were yelling at this guy to get on the ground, and before he could stand up or put down his beer they tasered him in his sweat pants. Your fifteen minutes in the Roman Coliseum? I'm still working on a painting based on this drawing.

I usually begin by making a series of drawings for a painting. I like the staged quality of having people pose for these characters. The fakeness can be very abstract, and have more of a quality of metaphor. At the same time you have the sense of this real person underneath acting it out, and the memory of drawing these figures from life gives me a more visceral starting place.



GAS! Oil on panel 48" x 60"

In "Ghosts and Zombies" I began with the idea of an analogy between Republicans and Democrats, or between their cliched portrayals—mindless gut reactors and inactive contemplators. It ended up more generally about id versus ego or extroverts and introverts. Mount Rushmore is left over from that initial plan that didn't add up, but it reinforces these two directions of frivolous fun and memory. Narrative is always out at the edge of what functions as a visual idea, so much of the event gets buried in the form. I think people have the false impression that art works are about one thing, so clarity of image or inventiveness in design starts to negate other content. Creative processes are more open-ended than that. I was thinking of glow-in-the-dark Halloween decorations when I decided the ghost should be bright green, but I also just wanted an excuse for that color situation.

I moved a similar green color over to the vampire in "Zombie, Ghoul, Ghost, Mummy, Vampire" to help make it a distinct re-examination of the subjects. The cast of dead characters are minimally described, and identifiable mainly through a process of elimination. The protagonists don't quite fit together—they lose their motivation just juxtaposed with other representations of a bad death or our baser selves. They become redundant without blood in their necks or brains in their heads. People imagine an obscure finer quality being eternal, but human awkwardness might last longer.

Robert McCann is an assistant professor in painting and foundations at Michigan State University. He has shown nationally and internationally, and in 2001 was awarded a Fulbright traveling fellowship to Berlin.