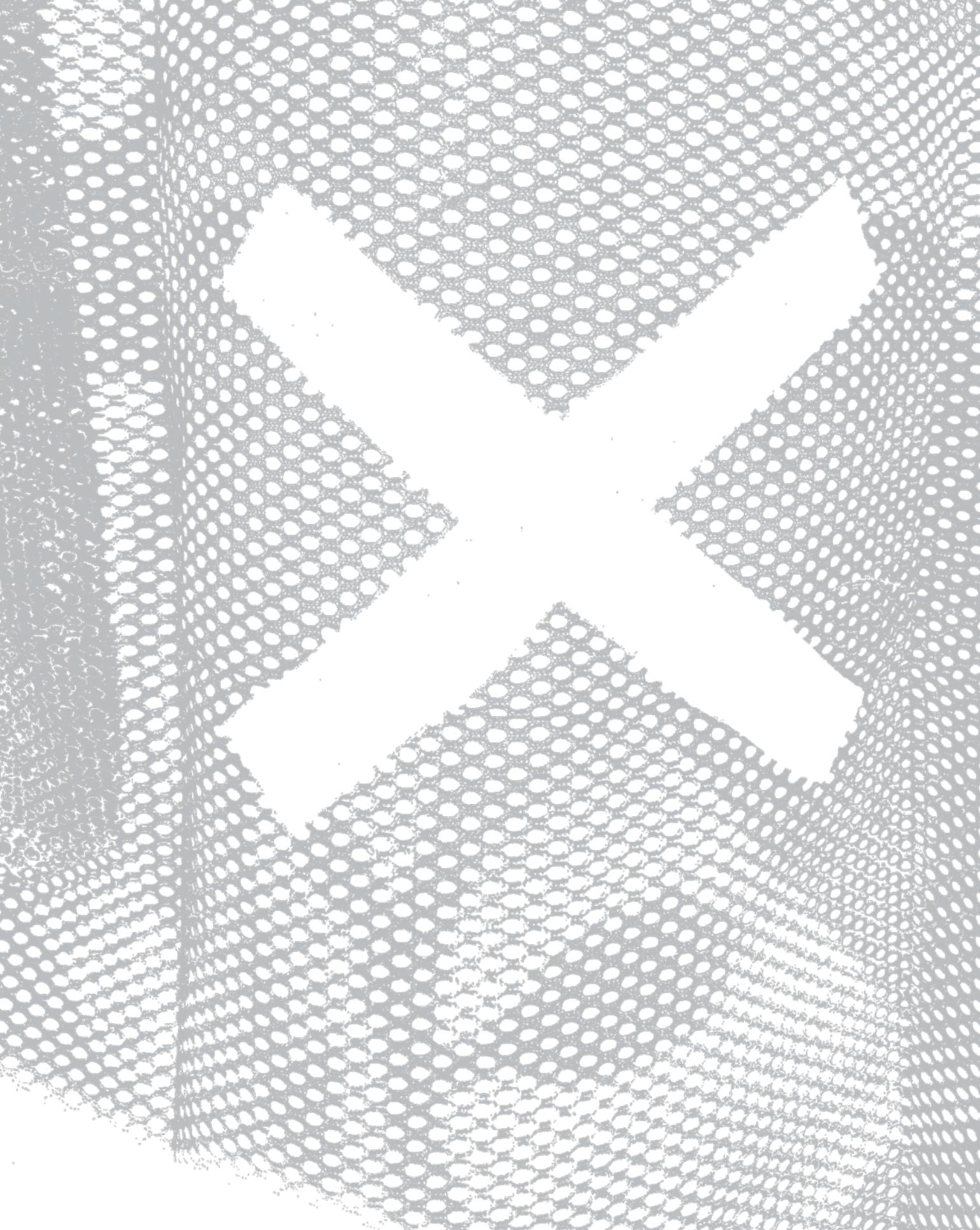


Glancing, Guttled

JIMMY BAKER



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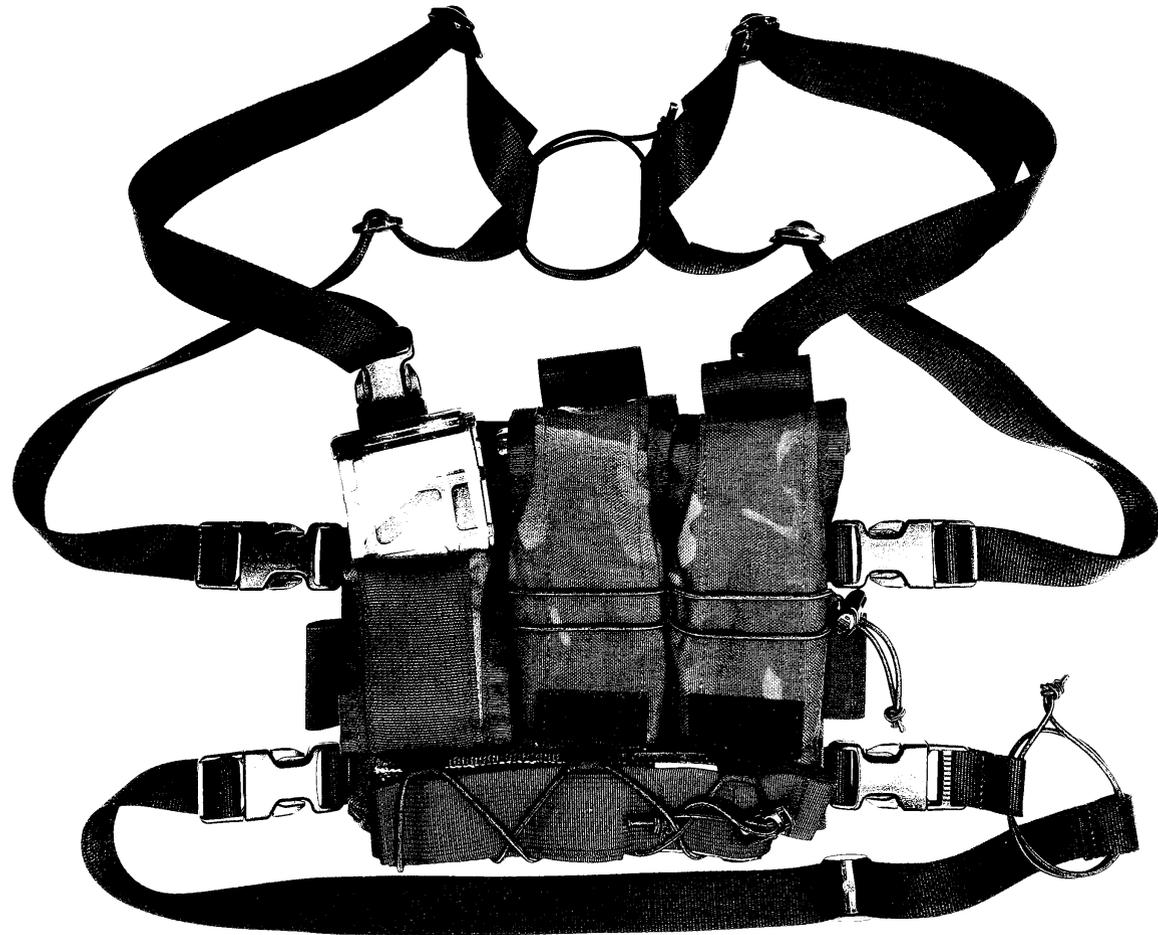
JIMMY BAKER

November 20 - January 31
2025 - 2026

Beeler Gallery
Columbus College of Art and Design







Pleasure as a Diagnostic Tool

In the era of algorithmic loops and rage-bait posting, the content we are most drawn to often incites outrage or displays moral/political superiority. My intention is to reframe pleasure, not as a reward or escape, but as a diagnostic tool. These six new paintings act as surfaces for divination that illuminate the viewer's ideological biases and manipulate their gaze.

The works absorb a saturated, chaotic language of online spectacle: state violence and protest documentation, met with the binding embrace of harnesses and tactical rigs. My process translates these references into the slow, visceral medium of oil painting. In doing so, I attempt to interrupt the immediate gratification of content consumption and ask the viewer to sit with the discomfort beyond the picture plane. The pleasure in these works comes not from formal beauty, but from the contradiction of being seduced by images that implicate us. These works go all-in on a complicated matrix of binaries that are continually flipping and reversing across three pairs of paintings.

Chronically online life has trained media consumers to crave high-contrast imagery, emotionally charged content, and optimized outrage. In this sense, pleasure is no longer neutral or communal; it is hyper-personalized, curated, and weaponized. These works function adjacent to that cycle while resisting its tempo, by stepping outside of the prevailing platforms and congealing these images into the viscous anachronistic surface of painting. The colors utilize synthetic mica pigments, reflective crushed glass hi-vis powders and the tactile nature of expressive brush work in these paintings to bait you into a conversation about pleasure, while instead exposing the mechanisms and framing of a pain and violence-based media warfare.

In painting scenes of confrontation and ideological division, I use pleasure to lure the viewer into a deeper engagement with the very forces they might wish to avoid. This isn't moral didacticism or outrage, but about our collective proximity. I want these images to feel seductive and volatile at once. To capture the cognitive dissonance that has become a defining space we have all collectively shared to an exponential degree since 2020, to embody the deeply personal pain of living through forty years of amplified culture wars in America.

The bindings, protest debris, fragmented landscapes, detention pornography, and institutional interiors are all enmeshed in the theater of cultural violence that is infinitely circulated by both new and legacy media. Collaging a variety of these image references in oils forces a more ambiguous function. They no longer live only in the economy of the click or the share. They occupy space, they take months to produce, they ask to be absorbed in person. In that way, pleasure becomes a lens to trace complicity, power, and visualize an ideology war of great centrifugal force.

Figure Ground Reversal

At the heart of this series is a deliberate use of reversal. *Soft Power 1, 3, and 5* depict media spectacles of detention and detainment bound by leather harnesses. While *Soft Power 2, 4, and 6* depict violent protests constrained by tactical military-police rigs. This inversion is both compositional and ideological. The formal structures and shifting warm and cool tones are all supporting stark oppositional shifts. It is about showing how power cycles back and forth, how each side lives in the other's shadow, how domination plays out differently between tactile violence and moral superiority, yet it is not exclusive to one camp.

These paintings flirt with absurdity by leveraging partial-abstraction/partial-representational collage packed into the simplistic framework of a singular gestural brushstroke form floating centrally on a ground. The gestures are purely intuitive, and shape based. They are generated by a five to ten second gesture drawing using India ink and Hake brushes on paper. It often takes over a hundred attempts to achieve a mere six shapes that I am willing pursue building a composition with. These high-contrast black and white forms are processed digitally and become the focal glyph that everything builds around.

The foundational formal principle of figure ground reversal is now entangled into the binary trappings of the subject matter and how it presents itself compositionally. I invert and clash charged clichés of performative media violence that speak more to the nature of ideological framing and spectacle than these individual historical moments of unrest in America. Like most of my previous work, these paintings subject the viewer to a fragmentation that relies on the sum of its parts and not individually decipherable imagery. These chaotic and eerily lyrical chroma-glazed subjects are

irrevocably bound as harnesses and tactical rigs become a metaphor for how images are shaped, constrained, and packaged with preconceived meaning. This is where painting's history becomes essential. Unlike photography or digital media, painting carries centuries of visual ideology. It is slow, heavy, and unavoidably bodily in scale and touch. These paintings become an analog to the deep hallucinations of our collective psyche, sharing an interest in the notion of mutation that generative AI has equally produced in parallel at this absurd moment.

The medium of painting is fossilized in a history rife with exploitation and documentation of power struggles throughout humanity. I see these as offerings towards an abstracted documentation of living through the vulgarity of the rise of American techno-authoritarianism.

These works are not declarations, they are mirrors. They reflect a cultural binary that has become increasingly symmetrical, where both sides adopt the tactics of the other. Where outrage becomes clickbait, and where resistance and repression begin to rhyme. In that sense, the works are meant to feel uncomfortable. They don't offer resolution. They implicate everyone.

In the end, the bindings, the paint, the reversals—they all point to one thing: that we are trapped in a loop. A loop of image, ideology, and spectacle. And maybe the only way out is to stop looking through the frame and start looking at it.

Thresholding Restraint

Restraint is a throughline in these works, both formally and thematically. All the black bindings utilize the visual processing of a global 50% threshold to produce a stark, high-contrast binary image resulting in pure black or transparent in the image output. This achieves a very harsh photocopy aesthetic. Just as I spoke of the figure ground reversal mimicking polarities, this formal application of thresholding also retains pure oppositional binaries at the core of its visual DNA.

The functions of the bindings are now muddied as the stenciled thick black oil paint physically builds the illusion of two distinct forms of binding: harnesses and tactical rigs.

It is imperative to strip both of these functions, pleasure (leather harnesses), and protection (military-tactical rigs) from the form of the bindings. This is an act of denial of purpose and equally relegates both forms to a compromised and incomplete state of being.

The first three paintings in this series feature leather harnesses binding abstracted compositions that glance at state control structures, such as large passenger plane portal windows, institutional architecture, shackles, and detainment issued Crocs. The harness here is both metaphor and map. It plots the bastardized left-leaning signifier as a framework to view the atrocities of authoritarianism and commerce of its subsequent depiction. This leaves the viewer staring into the mirror of personal ideological bias, and asks which interpretation will be staring back at them?

The seemingly left-leaning harness is binding the right-perpetuated state detention in a soft theater of periwinkle, icy cool cyan, and lavender. The base signifier of the harness speaks to pleasure, consent, and a self-imposed power dynamic shared amongst parties. A more nuanced reading is steeped in post-war ultra-masculine queer history. This iconic form clearly takes on a multiplicity of meanings in our current climate, and I deliberately avoid implicating queer identities directly by omitting any literal to-scale body wearing the bindings. Instead, I use the harness as a broader symbol of constraint and entanglement. One that speaks to symmetrical power cycles across ideological lines, and floats hauntingly on the surface of the paintings stripped of agency or empowerment.

Leather harnesses are now substituted for military-tactical rigs in the remaining three paintings. The tactical bindings speak to protection, law and order. While equally restrictive, stark and black; they wrap around painterly depictions of left-leaning protests and public resistance in a loosely representational twilight. Skateboards smash windshields, graffiti glazes cars, and fires glow in the background. Frenetic looping shapes zip tie silhouettes of restrained protesters, much the same as the Alien Enemies Act has been reanimated in sweeping detainment of residents in our country.

These paintings reference ICE raids, protests in Los Angeles, and the spectacle of resistance. But again, I fragment and obscure the imagery, rendering it unstable and difficult to resolve. Colors also shift across these three paintings as the backgrounds glow in warm magentas and pinks, while the foregrounds take on icy tones present

in the backgrounds of the first three works. The bindings here now tighten to suppress dissent. The inherent benevolent notion of state provided protection and order granted to its constituents has now been removed from the tactical rigs as these enforcement agencies are used as weapons against our own people. Meanwhile the tactical rig is now a militarized garment of war folded in on itself as it has achieved its final form of authoritarianism after progressing in this direction over the second half of the twentieth century.

The reversals in these paintings are not about flipping sides but showing the cyclical nature of state power. No ideology has clean hands. Both liberal and conservative systems use force, restraint, and media spectacle to control narratives. The bindings depicted in these works become a unifying symbol of domination sans intended function. What changes is who wears it, who wields it, and who is bound by it. The viewer must actively work to decipher the paintings, and in doing so confronts their own assumptions about the violence of imagery and media consumption. There is no clear hero or villain in these works. Only power, looping back on itself.

Time Dilation

My early work explored Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception* and how we are all potentially vulnerable to broad authoritarian overreaches of power in "emergency" situations. This two-decade-old work feels eerily familiar as acts from 1789 are unearthed and weaponized in 2025. Meanwhile, right-leaning influencers have recently cited Carl Schmitt's theories on dictatorship out in the open as seen in Mehdi Hasan's infamous 10M+ viewed Surrounded debate on the Los Angeles based Jubilee YouTube channel. These social influencers foster parasocial bonds with frequent posting, self-disclosure, and intimacy illusions which amplify trust and diffusion of complex political philosophy to broad audiences. Schmitt's themes (order via sovereign decisiveness) fit emotionally with those seeking certainty in chaotic contemporary media narratives.

As our country faces self-imposed uncertainty, we are bearing witness to fascist rhetoric not hiding in the dark forest but sunbathing in the open like a bad Seurat print for sale on Amazon. Americans have an uncanny ability to vote against their



Potential Unlawful Combatant 1
Oil and resin on panel.
24" x 18"
2008

own interests or self-preservation by worshiping a top-down power dynamic, as long as it inflicts pain on their ideological opposition.

The working-class Yellow Vest protestor movement (*Mouvement des Gilets Jaunes*) of Covid-era France were demanding economic equality in the face of rising costs of fuel, living, and taxation. The vests became a signifier of labor solidarity and bottom-up resistance. During this same period, the blue collar American working class was being radicalized by a more calculated ideological assault. The labor class here has been abandoned by liberal policies and convinced that shifting power back to the right will own the other side as the ruse of the culture war has cleanly obfuscated the importance of the class war.

Fast forward to the Q1 of 2025, as we have witnessed the theater of detention, detainment, and deportation. The strategy of owning shame as honor has replaced prior images of horror that previously had to be leaked as seen in the torture selfies from Gitmo in 2004. Now we can observe protestors as well as masked I.C.E. enforcement and DHS agents donning these same hi-vis vests as they peacock in staged human-dog-kennels for the cameras that capture the high relief of figures like Kristi Noem posing as literal chum in the water just beyond the reach of gulag bars in what has been deemed “third-countries” permissible for criminal deportation.

I utilize the specter of these hi-vis vests as a compositional element that straddles both sides of the ideological aisle that are apparent in these paintings. I am mixing synthetic mica pigments, and reflective crushed glass beads to achieve a visual experience in these paintings that mimics the materiality of safety vests. They become the shared neutral party form that shape-shifts its subject from safety marking to the colors that elicit an instinctual danger response in nature. A fluorescent canary in the coal mine of collapse.

Complicity Loves Company

Painting these images without employing any UV printing (found in my paintings from 2010-2022) radically alters their meaning. It materially distances them from physically embedding digital imagery into the paintings and quells them into objects

of contemplation. Within that transformation, it also implicates me. I am not just a transmitter of imagery but am embedded in the process. The slowness of painting, its physical demands, its long history of depicting and wielding power, all of it brings me into the work. Not just as author, but as witness and participant.

Painting, for me, is both resistance and submission. I resist the rapid consumption of digital content by slowing it down, materializing it, and documenting it with partial abstraction. I also submit to the image: to its history, its power, its contradictions.

When I paint a binding over a protest scene, I am not just designing a composition. I'm participating in a lineage of artists who aestheticize violence, who wrestle with representation, who ask the viewer to sit with beauty and brutality the same.

The physical labor of painting is a form of ownership. I chose to structure and frame this information the way a media pundit or social commentator might assemble evidence. That makes me accountable. It's not just about the external cast: the right, the left, the state, or the protestors. It is about my interests, shaped by search words, geolocation and demographic data, algorithmic discovery and click-through rates.

This is where painting becomes a reckoning. I am using a medium historically associated with power, masculinity, and cultural authority. I am placing myself inside its legacy, fully aware of how my own position echoes those structures screaming from the inside out. Yet, I am also using it to reframe those very systems, in an attempt to step outside this symmetrical infinity loop of self-inflicted pain and punishment. To feel like something urgent and volatile has been documented in pigment and surface, and in hopes that these paintings do not resurface in two more decades like an ominous time capsule.



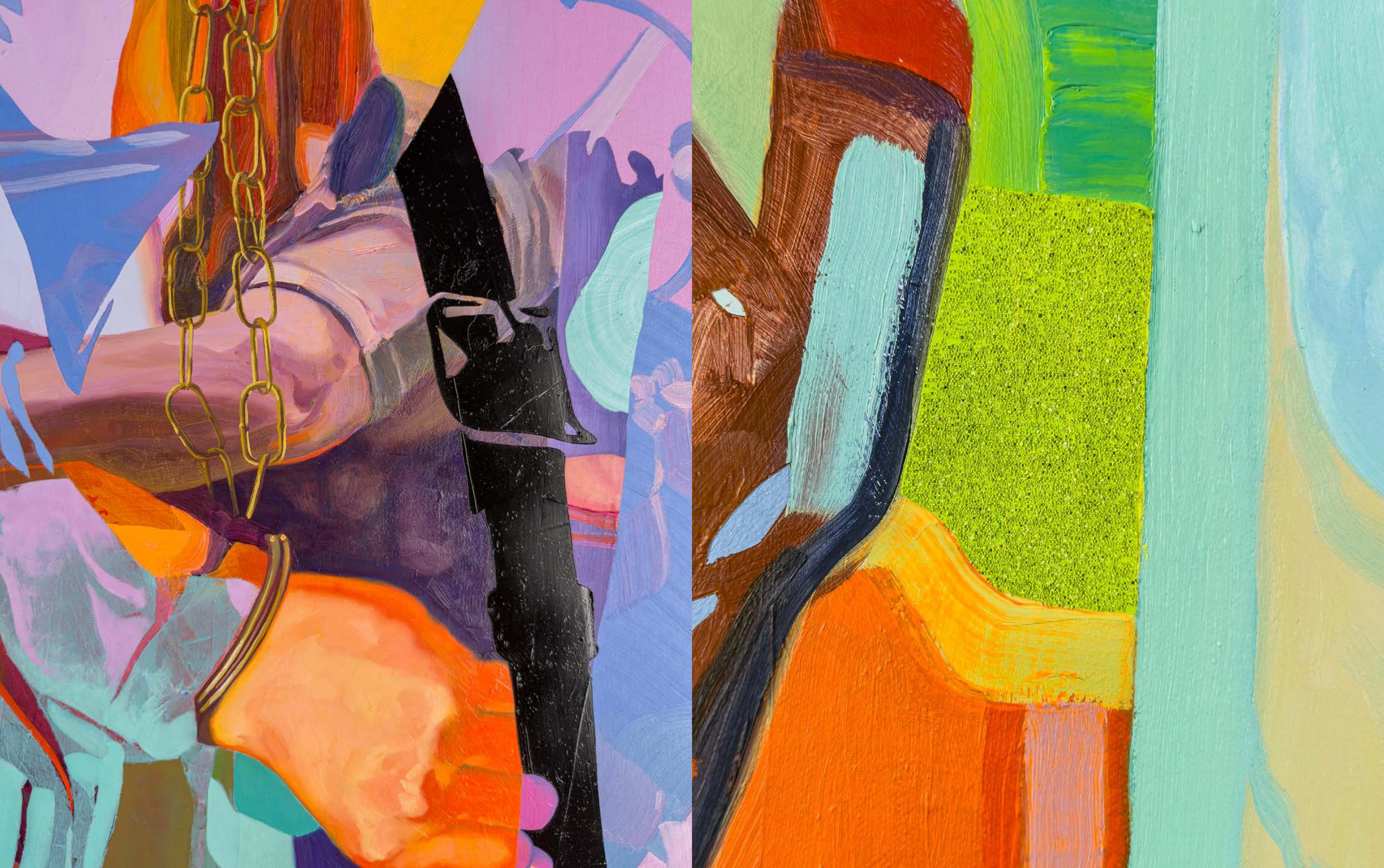
Six Paintings



Soft Power 1

Oil, aerosol, mica pigment and hi-vis crushed glass on canvas over panel.
56" x 46"
2025





Soft Power 2

Oil, aerosol, mica pigment, hi-vis crushed glass, and paper on canvas over panel.
56" x 46"
2025

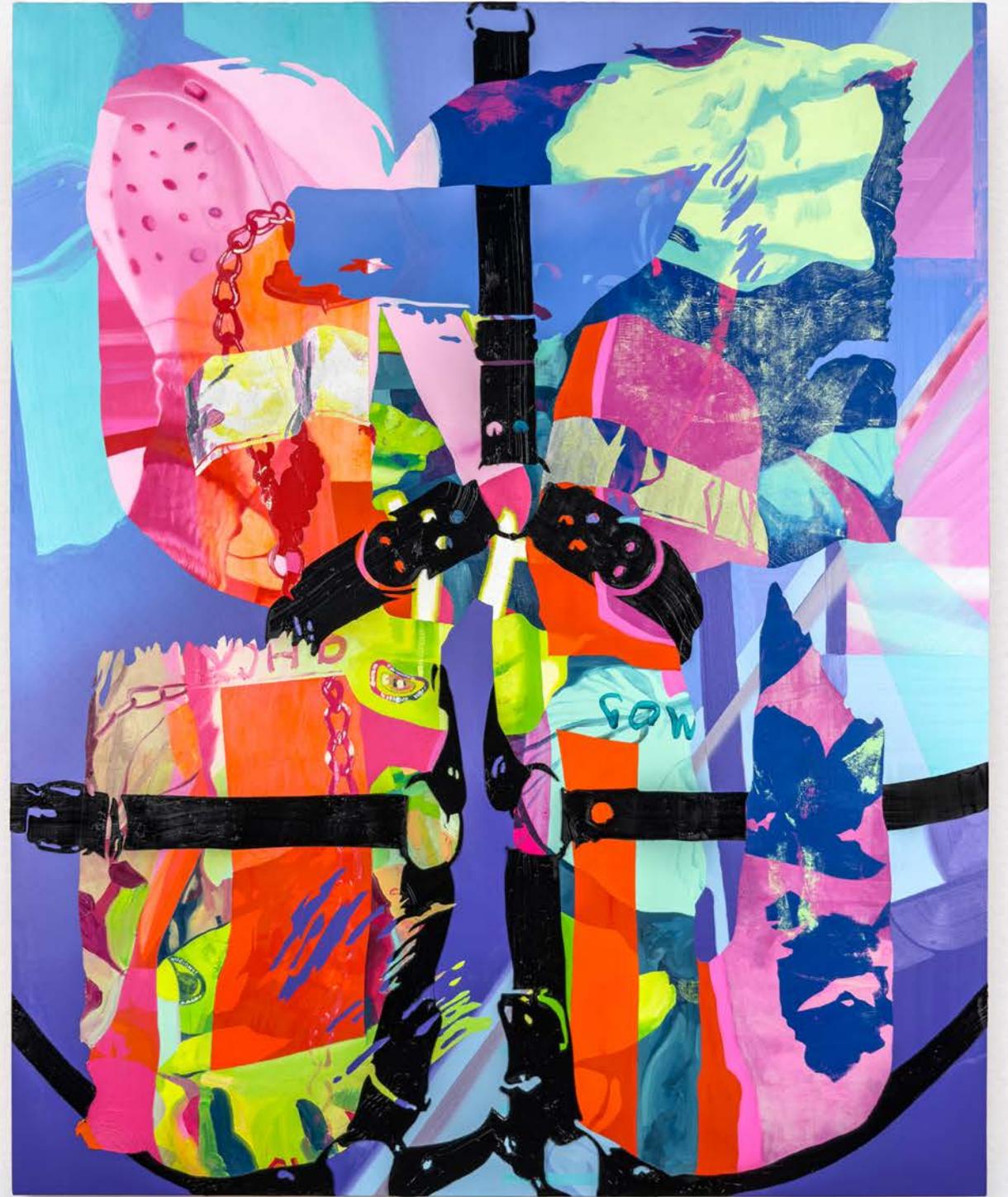






Soft Power 3

Oil, aerosol, mica pigment and hi-vis crushed glass on canvas over panel.
56" x 46"
2025





Soft Power 4
Oil, aerosol, mica pigment and hi-vis crushed glass on canvas over panel.
56" x 46"
2025







Soft Power 5
Oil, aerosol, mica pigment and hi-vis crushed glass on canvas over panel.
56" x 46"
2025





Soft Power 6

Oil, aerosol, mica pigment and hi-vis crushed glass on canvas over panel.
56" x 46"
2025







Acknowledgements

for Jill and Ruby

Portrait Photo Credit:

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Institutional Support:

Columbus College of Art and Design, Art Academy of Cincinnati

Special Thanks:

Tim, Rory, Miles, Jay, Daniel, Jenny, Nathan, Matt C, Matt L, Amy, Chelsey, Sarah S, Joe, Keith, Caroline, Carter, Brandon, Sarah F, and Laura.

This exhibition comes twenty three years after graduating at CCAD, where I met the love of my life.

I could not have made it here without the love and support of Jim and Alesa.

Published November 2025
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