Disneyland, Suburbia, and Drugs: The Futility of Escaping Reality in the Art of Camille Rose Garcia

Erin M. Grant

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses/172
DISNEYLAND, SUBURBIA, AND DRUGS: THE FUTILITY OF ESCAPING REALITY IN
THE ART OF CAMILLE ROSE GARCIA

by
ERIN GRANT

Under the Direction of Susan Richmond, PhD

ABSTRACT

Contemporary American “lowbrow” painter Camille Rose Garcia’s paintings from 2000 to 2004 depict dystopic toxic fantasy worlds where cartoon girls and animals are persecuted by evil creatures. Garcia’s sociopolitical messages in these works speak to the futility and irresponsibility of attempting to escape reality through retreating into isolated fantasy worlds or by abusing legal pharmaceuticals. The artificial utopias of Disneyland and suburbia and the utopic psychological space created by drug use assumed to be reality are rather simulacra as conceptualized by Jean Baudrillard. Garcia’s work asks viewers to set aside the desire to flee reality and encourages ideological rejection of these simulacra as reality by introducing fantastic and dystopian polysemy that disrupts prevailing notions of reality and exposes the systemic causes of current sociopolitical problems. For Garcia, a populace that continues blindly to accept Baudrillardian simulacra as reality will lead to the chaos and violence she depicts in her work.

INDEX WORDS: Camille Rose Garcia, Lowbrow art, Pop surrealism, 21st-Century art, Dystopias, Simulacra, Jean Baudrillard
DISNEYLAND, SUBURBIA, AND DRUGS: THE FUTILITY OF ESCAPING REALITY IN
THE ART OF CAMILLE ROSE GARCIA

by

ERIN GRANT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
2015
DISNEYLAND, SUBURBIA, AND DRUGS: THE FUTILITY OF ESCAPING REALITY IN
THE ART OF CAMILLE ROSE GARCIA

by

ERIN GRANT

Committee Chair:  Susan Richmond

Committee:   Maria Gindhart

                John Decker

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

May 2015
DEDICATION

I would like to thank my parents, Ron and Vicki Bagley, for all their support throughout my entire life as well as during my seemingly endless academic pursuits. I would also like to thank my friends near and far, who always kept me going when things seemed too tough to bear between life, work, and school. Most of all, I’d like to thank my amazing husband, Craig Grant, whose endurance in putting up with me through two master’s degrees as well as the writing of this thesis is an enormous feat of patience and love that I can only hope to someday repay.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Susan Richmond, my adviser, as well as my thesis committee members, Dr. Maria Gindhart and Dr. John Decker, for their excellent guidance and advice. I have immensely enjoyed being a student in their courses over these past years at Georgia State, and am always in awe of their seemingly effortless ability to continuously deliver insightful, relevant, and well-researched art history education with patience, grace, and good humor.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ........................................................................................................ v

**LIST OF FIGURES** ........................................................................................................ vii

1  **ARTICLE** .................................................................................................................... 1

2  **FIGURES** .................................................................................................................. 29

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ........................................................................................................... 41

**ENDNOTES** .................................................................................................................. 45
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Camille Rose Garcia, *Cherrygirls vs. Contamination*, 2000. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 30”x60”. ................................................................................................................................................. 29

Figure 2: Camille Rose Garcia, *Who’s Afraid of the Peppermint Man*, 2002. Acrylic, oil, and glitter on wood, 32”x48” ................................................................................................................................................. 30

Figure 3: Camille Rose Garcia, *Who’s Afraid of the Peppermint Man* (Detail), 2002. Acrylic, watercolor, and glitter on paper, 14”x14”. .................................................................................................................. 31

Figure 4: Camille Rose Garcia, *Dream Factory Escape Pod*, 2001. Acrylic, oil, and glitter on wood, 72”x96”. ................................................................................................................................................. 32

Figure 5: The classic Disney characters welcome visitors outside Sleeping Beauty Castle at Disneyland in Anaheim, California. .................................................................................................................. 33

Figure 6: Camille Rose Garcia, *Parasite Eradication Squad*, 2001. Acrylic, oil, and glitter on wood, 35”x48”. ................................................................................................................................................. 34

Figure 7: Camille Rose Garcia, *Domestic Surveillance Program*, 2003. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 24”x36”. ................................................................................................................................................. 34

Figure 8: Camille Rose Garcia, *Shine Your Teeth Till Meaningless*, 2004. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 22”x15”. ................................................................................................................................................. 36

Figure 9: Camille Rose Garcia, *Pharmaceuticools* (Panel 3), 2002. Acrylic and watercolor on paper, 14”x21”. ................................................................................................................................................. 37

Figure 10: Camille Rose Garcia, *Pharmaceuticools* (Panel 4), 2002. Acrylic and watercolor on paper, 14”x21”. ................................................................................................................................................. 38

Figure 11: Camille Rose Garcia, *Sleep and Destroy*, 2004. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 24”x48”. ................................................................................................................................................. 39
Figure 12: Camille Rose Garcia, *Black Kraken Hijack*, 2004. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 48”x48”. ............................................................................................................................ 40
Contemporary American painter Camille Rose Garcia is generally associated with the late twentieth-early twenty-first century art scene based in California most often referred to as “lowbrow” art. However, in contrast to the masculine hot-rod, pinup, and popular culture subjects often depicted in much of lowbrow art, Garcia’s early paintings represent dystopic toxic fantasy worlds where lethargic, miserable, and yet still somehow Disney-cute cartoon girls and animals are persecuted and terrorized by evil mutant creatures. The sociopolitical messages underpinning many of Garcia’s work from the early 2000s speak to the futility and irresponsibility of attempting to escape the alarming contemporary state of American reality through retreating into isolated fantasy worlds or by abusing legal pharmaceuticals to numb oneself to reality. Many of Garcia’s paintings from this period illustrate the ineffective strategy of contemporary Americans to inhabit these artificial spaces in order to remain safe from and unaware of the instability and anxiety of quotidian existence. The artificial utopias of Disneyland and suburbia, as well as the euphoric and narcotized psychological space created by drug use, are then assumed to be reality, but are rather simulacra as conceptualized by Jean Baudrillard.

By demonstrating that these two types of escapist attempts to cope with an unpleasant social and political reality are not effective and actually contribute to, rather than insulate oneself from, current collective problems, Garcia’s work asks viewers to set aside the desire to flee from reality. Her paintings also encourage viewers to reject the ideological grip of these simulacra as constituting reality by introducing fantastic and dystopian polysemy that disrupts prevailing notions of reality and exposes the systemic causes of current sociopolitical problems. Through a close reading of several of Garcia’s paintings from 2000 to 2004, I will demonstrate how the artist’s dystopic paintings act as a warning and preventative to viewers that any attempted escape
from contemporary American reality is futile and unproductive, and offer the hope that a more aware and critically thoughtful populace can fight back against the destructive, greed-driven forces that threaten the environment and disenfranchise populations. For Garcia, a populace that continues blindly to accept Baudrillardian simulacra as reality will necessarily lead to the chaos and violence she depicts in her own cautionary and dystopic fantastic worlds.

Garcia was born in Los Angeles in 1970 to a mother who is a Franco-German mural and sign painter and a father who was a Mexican abstract painter who later studied film and became a figure in the California Hispanic film movement. After her parents’ divorce in her early childhood, her mother relocated to Huntington Beach, a predominantly white suburb in Orange County south of L.A. Located close nearby, Disneyland was an influential attraction that Garcia visited frequently in her youth and that later deeply informed both the style and content of her adult work. In her teens, Garcia worked on murals under the tutelage of her mother before attending art school at Otis Parsons and later UC Davis, where she eventually became disillusioned with what she perceived as the insularity of art academia, its restrictive visual edicts, and lack of relevance to the larger world. Following graduate school and a summer at the prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, Garcia found little professional or financial success as a burgeoning artist and consequently stopped making art for two years, spending her time working at coffeehouses and forming an all-female punk band, The Real Minx. During this hiatus from the art world she began supporting herself by doing graphic design and illustration, but was eventually re-inspired to return to painting professionally by discovering other Los Angeles artists with narrative, illustrative painting styles similar to her own within the local lowbrow art scene, particularly Mark Ryden and the Clayton Brothers.
Lowbrow art’s roots are located in the predominantly male hot-rod counterculture of Los Angeles in the late 1950s and early 1960s, where artists such as Ed “Big Daddy” Roth and Robert Williams combined the growing popularity of customizing and painting recreational vehicles with campy or menacing imagery drawn from drive-in monster movies, horror comics, television programs, and overtly sexualized images of women from pinup and pulp magazines. Lowbrow remained a self-contained fringe art scene largely ignored both by the public and mainstream art critics until the late 1980s, when works by Williams and Filipino transplant Manuel Ocampo appeared in newly established galleries that began to establish lowbrow art as a legitimate West Coast movement. In the ‘90s, public recognition of lowbrow art gained significant momentum with the inclusion of Williams’ and Ocampo’s paintings in MoCA’s 1992 exhibit *Helter Skelter* and with Laguna Art Museum’s *Kustom Kulture* exhibit of 1993, which focused on artwork related to California’s hot-rod and custom car culture and featured work by Roth, Williams, and Von Dutch. Encouraged by a growing public and curatorial interest in this formerly overlooked subgenre of art, Williams founded *Juxtapoz* magazine in 1994 to chronicle and promote lowbrow artists in “an accessible art magazine highlighting the imaginations and skills of a large group of artists that are simply disenfranchised by the formal academic art authority.”

By 1997 to 1999, the lowbrow movement gained traction as a growing voice of West Coast counterculture art, centered around Los Angeles but aided in dissemination to a wider national and even international audience through the internet and *Juxtapoz* magazine. Garcia, who was primarily supporting herself with graphic design and illustration work at the time as well as playing in her punk band, was inspired to return to painting in part because of the similarities she saw in lowbrow art to her own maturing style. Garcia had previously seen the
1992 *Helter Skelter* exhibit while an undergraduate at Otis Parsons and was already captivated by the work of Ocampo, Williams, Paul McCarthy, and Lari Pitman. While her graduate work at UC Davis contained a more aggressively overt sociopolitical agenda, her illustration work and private artistic dabbling during the late ‘90s veered more towards “narrative-based stuff in collage” and coalesced into a style similar to many lowbrow artists being shown in LA galleries. Lowbrow’s acceptance of illustrative, representative, and narrative styles, which were not legitimized by the academic art world of the time, emboldened Garcia to begin participating in this growing scene. She notes: “Seeing the Clayton Brothers and Mark Ryden’s work for the first time changed my life. At the time they emerged, in the high art world it was all blobby paintings, non-representational abstract nothing painting. If you had anything representational in your work, it was like you were a leper, like it would be contagious and you would infect the high art world with your faces and eyeballs.” Garcia was galvanized to return to painting through growing engagement with her own illustration work and perhaps also by being immersed within the milieu of high-level independent graphic and illustrated material being produced at this time, particularly for small-run and limited-edition music concert posters.

Garcia’s first major gallery show, *The Happiest Place on Earth*, held at the Merry Karnowsky Gallery in LA in 2000, marked the beginning of her maturing painting style and represented a professional and financial artistic breakthrough, as the show sold out before opening. The acrylic and glitter paintings featured in this show contrasted the artificially created and perpetually happy space of Disneyland with the depressed, drugged-out suburbia of Garcia’s childhood and teens in an effort to “capture that contradiction of living in a fairytale world that is actually an evil, narcissistic wasteland.” This contradiction is apparent in *Cherrygirls vs. Contamination* (Figure 1), where a gaggle of nearly identical and mostly cheerful
Disney-esque girls cavort upon the body of a massive black centipede creature, seemingly unaware of or unconcerned by the brown pools of toxic chemicals oozing from overturned barrels, the grey clouds of pollution issuing from factory smokestacks in the distance, the menacing cartoon pig leering at their play, and the toxic danger represented by the centipede itself.

After *The Happiest Place on Earth*, Garcia went on to have at least one more solo show a year, often in LA’s Merry Karnowsky Gallery, and also had both solo and group shows across the country, in New York, and internationally. Garcia’s work from 2000 until 2006 generally extended and built on the initial painting style and dark psychological undertones from *The Happiest Place on Earth* show, and reflected a more limited and subdued palette that is perhaps in part a response to LA’s infamous smog. It is Garcia’s work during the first four of these years that is the focus of this paper, since Garcia relocated from LA to a rural part of the Pacific Northwest in 2007, a move which profoundly altered the palette and emotional tone of her work, succinctly described by her former gallerist Merry Karnowsky as a shift “from somber to almost psychedelic.” Garcia describes the relocation as an attempt to break away from an increasingly socially prominent “art star” lifestyle that left her with little time with which to create art, as well as reflecting her desire to live more self-sufficiently in a location removed from LA, a metropolitan area that has certainly seen civil unrest, and that she felt could once again become dangerous and chaotic in the event of an economic or political collapse. Garcia acknowledges that her move to the Pacific Northwest represents a type of personal escape, noting, “The concept of escapism is actually ever present in my work and life, literally and figuratively…In my own life, I felt I had to escape constantly – first from the suburbs, then from the city.” Rather than an action potentially undermining the broader anti-escapist message underpinning her work prior
to 2007, Garcia views her relocation as a necessary physical distancing from her previous known environment that has allowed her to reflect and comment more clearly on contemporary society through her work.\(^\text{17}\)

Because of its sociopolitical content, stylistic cross-pollination and ambiguity, and resistance to facile interpretation, Garcia’s work inhabits a rather small and unusual intersection between the lowbrow scene and the academic art world.\(^\text{18}\) Building on the content of her work from UC Davis, Garcia’s work since 2000 shares certain stylistic similarities and influences with the general lowbrow aesthetic, but also evidences an underlying sociopolitical agenda that is often absent from other lowbrow art.\(^\text{19}\) Her visual language incorporates elements of traditional lowbrow art – narration, representation, figuration, and the strong influence of illustration, cartoons, and comics – but also utilizes collage and cut-up effects as well as abstract shapes and indeterminate backgrounds that result in multiple planes and complex temporospatial relationships within her paintings. For instance, in *Who’s Afraid of the Peppermint Man* (Figure 2), Garcia’s use of a repetitive procession of indistinct figural shapes similar to that of and ultimately ending with the completely formed titular Peppermint Man figure complicates a simple reading of time and space; should they be read as separate figures in their own right, or rather as the unfolding through time of the Peppermint Man’s physical progress towards the house in the left of the painting? The painting’s temporospatial ambiguity is furthered by three similarly shaped women’s heads and torsos emanating from the house’s chimney; again, do they represent individual figures, or describe the sequential activity of the same woman escaping from the house? Speaking specifically about her work from her 2001 show *The Soft Machine* but equally applicable to her later work, Garcia explains, “I was also playing with the idea of a ‘broken narrative,’ which William Burroughs does in his cut-up writings. A broken narrative in
painting means to abstract the space or the linear motion…I was interested in laying abstract and
real space together in the same painting to create a kind of dreamlike landscape with multiple
layers of meaning, not just a literal interpretation of space.”20 Although the broad themes of her
work are readily apparent – environmental destruction, the horrors of war, the destructive side of
capitalism, and the dangerous game of self-medication – individual works deliberately refuse
easy parsing and avoid pat solutions or simplistic dictates.21

Emphasizing both a stylistic and philosophical dichotomy in lowbrow art between artists
who embrace the lowbrow term and truck in subversive anti-elitism, and artists who distance
themselves from the label to participate more widely in the traditional art world, Chon Noriega
locates Garcia’s work within this latter camp, despite her disillusionment with and rejection of
the academic art system. Noriega describes this strain of lowbrow art more aligned with the
traditional art world as one in which artists draw from a larger range of stylistic influences than
primarily comics, which is certainly applicable to Garcia’s work. In this group of lowbrow
artists, Noriega also identifies a tendency towards retention of the formal boundaries that keep
the viewer outside of instead of drawn into or implicated in the artwork itself, which
consequently demands a “series of conscious, and even ethical, choices” from the viewer.22
Lending credence to Noriega’s identification of Garcia as stylistically belonging more to the art
world than to lowbrow, Garcia does not consider herself a lowbrow artist “mainly because I
think that term refers to a kind of work that came out of a car culture and underground comix.
Lowbrow refers to male artists who do art about male things like cars and pinup images. It refers
more to the older school…Comics might be the only thing I share with the lowbrow artists.”23

Despite the facility with which Garcia’s paintings potentially fit in with the traditional art
world, she has rarely been written about in academic art literature; there only appears to be the
handful of excellent and insightful short essays at the beginning of her three published monographs (*The Saddest Place on Earth*, *Tragic Kingdom*, and *Mirror, Black Mirror*), and a master’s thesis by Jennifer De La Cruz from 2010 entitled “The Art of Camille Rose Garcia: An Existential Fairy Tale.” Although there is a definite lack of critical art writing about Garcia’s work, she has had multiple interviews and profiles in the local and popular press, niche art and culture publications like *Juxtapoz, Super7, Art Prostitute*, and *Bust*, as well as brief pieces in *Artweek* and *NY Arts Magazine*. Garcia’s lack of representation in academic art literature is undoubtedly in part due to the wider unpopularity of lowbrow art to academics, which Ian Lowey and Suzy Prince attribute to several factors. Lowey and Prince theorize that lowbrow’s deliberately wide accessibility, palpable sense of humor and fun, privileging of mimetic technical skills, and reliance on referencing “low” popular culture runs antithetical to the fine art establishment’s interests. They also point out that attendant with their generally rebellious attitude, lowbrow artists have for the most part been as reluctant (and vocally so) to participate in art academia as the latter has been to accept lowbrow artists into the canon. Garcia has certainly followed this rebellious trend of lowbrow artists, having been an outspoken critic of fine art education and art academia in several of her interviews, which probably has not helped endear her to potential allies within the fine art world.

Although Garcia works within the accepted art world by participating in mainstream gallery and museum shows, she seems to have been more active and experienced more financial and professional success within the parallel system of the lowbrow art scene. As mentioned above, this is in part due to the mutual antipathy between lowbrow and the art world establishment, but also stems from her desire for a more widespread and diverse audience than she perceives the traditional art world is able to provide for her. The lowbrow art scene and
attendant economy sprang up and has continued to flourish with its own interconnected network of galleries, publications, collectors, and reliance on the internet as sources distinct from the art world. Both lowbrow and the traditional art world are certainly reliant on commerce but in different ways; Doug Harvey speculates that lowbrow artists, just as talented as their art world peers but perhaps more subject to socioeconomic pressures, “decided to forgo the cultural cachet and complex protocols of capital-A Art and peddle their skills directly to the mass-media marketplace…placing their trust in the marketplace as the only fair arbiter of aesthetic quality.”

Harvey also rightly points out that although the mass market for easily-consumable art that lowbrow created can skew to cheap and sometimes derivative merchandise and apparel, an attendant demand for original lowbrow artwork has nevertheless accompanied this trend. Garcia has produced some commercial items like hand-glittered prints, vinyl toys, tattoo flash, t-shirts, and jewelry that she generally offers directly through her website because she enjoys “that sort of democratic way of having something available for people who can’t afford the paintings.” She is always heavily involved in the production of these products because of her hands-on nature as well as due to her concern for environmentally and ethically sound practices, and later discontinued her production of vinyl toys out of these concerns.

Through participating in the lowbrow scene as well as producing commercial art items, Garcia consciously attempts to capture the widest possible audience in order to circulate the sociopolitical messages in her artwork. This desire to draw in a diverse viewership is also perhaps why Garcia has eschewed overt self-identification with either Chicano or women artists. Cultural critic Josh Kun considers Garcia a synecdoche of the contemporary Chicano movement, which he asserts currently struggles with the tension between tradition and change in the twenty-first century. Both Kun and Garcia identify the broad theme of social protest throughout the
history of Chicano art as informing her visual critique of wealth and power. However, Garcia considers the use of identity politics too much of a potential barrier for her desired heterogeneous audience to effectively absorb the broader sociopolitical messages in her art, which is her ultimate aim. While Garcia acknowledges the importance of feminism and feminist art, particularly in paving the way for her ameliorated experience as a woman artist as compared to her mother’s, she considers 1970s feminist art somewhat monotonous, and stresses the use of dark humor as a tool to get one’s political message across. Although Garcia does not take a specifically feminist or Chicano viewpoint in her art, there is still an undercurrent in her work that champions historically disenfranchised groups and subtends her larger sociopolitical themes.

Garcia also courts a broad viewership through her visual language consciously designed to appeal to a broad range of viewers, employing tactics and styles such as narration, representation, figuration, ornamentation, and cartoon-like illustrated characters that often appear cute or adorable. Mike McGee, gallery director for Cal State Fullerton University, writes that Garcia’s paintings “exude a cuteness that is distinctly feminine while avoiding overt sentimentality. A scene may portray blood and puke and murder, but it is highlighted with glitter and presented on seductively shiny surfaces, and its characters are adorable, even the villains.” Garcia describes her use of glitter as part of a “quiet revolution” begun in art school against the unspoken stylistic rules that she saw as dictating legitimate art production. Even though the subject matter is disturbing, Garcia presents cartoon-like characters in an overall cute style in Who’s Afraid of the Peppermint Man (Figure 3), one of a series of six related works on paper from 2002. The Peppermint Man is clearly the villain in this narrative as, arm on waist, he jauntily fills a long trough with suspect cupcakes for the children and also appears waving to consumers on the Peppermint Town Buffet advertisement sign. Beside his pointed, claw-like
fingers and sinister black stovepipe hat, there is little stylistic difference between how he and the children he is victimizing are rendered; each are presented as equally and relentlessly adorable. The children continue to appear cute even as they swoon, drool, and vomit from the poisonous cupcakes, which are also anthropomorphized into smiling, gap-toothed cartoon caricatures.

García’s work from 2000 to 2004 depicts alternate fantasy worlds that are dystopias, presented as nightmarish, polluted, and violent wastelands that are ultimately shown to provide none of the psychological comforts and physical safety from an increasingly disturbing reality that their manufactured utopian antecedents, largely based on Disneyland and suburbia for García, purport to offer. These dystopian alternate fantasy worlds in García’s paintings aim to help viewers critically interrogate the real, as well as illuminate the hidden and disturbing narratives that have the potential to displace the fictional collective American utopic narrative. Writing about fantastic literature, Rosemary Jackson traces the production of literary fantasies to cultural absences and constraints resulting from the specific social contexts from which they arise, inexorably tethering seemingly discrete fantasy worlds to the real-world situations from which they originate.\footnote{Calling fantasy the “literature of unreality,” Jackson maintains that “the fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’ … Its introduction of the ‘unreal’ is set against the category of the ‘real’ – a category which the fantastic interrogates by its difference.”\footnote{Jackson theorizes that fantasy literature, and by extension fantasy art, also has the potential to act subversively by introducing multiple or contradictory truths, thereby dislocating and disturbing prevailing notions of reality. Through presenting cultural invisibilities and absences, fantastic art and literature introduces a non-signified area, a subversive act that has profound countercultural...}}
implications because it “represents a dissolution of a culture’s signifying practice, the very means by which it establishes meaning.”41

Certainly, not all fantasy art or literature by default challenges cultural signification or constructs of reality; Jackson suggests that fantastic works “subvert only if the reader is disturbed by their dislocated narrative form….Breaking single, reductive ‘truths,’ the fantastic traces a space within a society’s cognitive frame. It introduces multiple, contradictory ‘truths:’ it becomes polysemic.”42 Disneyland itself, while certainly a fantastic creation and alternate reality, does not act subversively in this way because it does not expose sociological invisibilities, introduce possible contradictory truths, or attempt to dislocate the mainstream process of cultural signification. Rather, Disneyland is an example of the kind of trite and conventional fantasy that Jack Zipes considers beholden to market conditions and existing audience misapprehensions rather than containing critical reflection, its ultimate goal to “bring about delusion and acclamation of particular sets of social relations that are commodified, sold, and consumed.”43 Darko Suvin also notes that Disneyland psychologically infantilizes adults and conceals its commodity dominance through its spatial difference from everyday life, foreclosing the possibility of critical distance.44 While the rampant commodification displayed in Disneyland certainly has the potential to intrude into and disrupt its created fantasy world by referencing outside reality, the overall experience nevertheless remains about visitors maintaining and buying into a seamless illusion. In contrast to this type of fantasy that is complicit with capitalism and the existing cultural status quo and that discourages critical reflection, Garcia’s paintings act as subversive fantastical works by illuminating and introducing silent and unseen truths that challenge the monolithic cultural conception of reality.
While fantastic literature and art can be considered a genre containing a spectrum of possible ideologies ranging from the subversively critical to a reification of the sociopolitical status quo, dystopic literature and art represent less of a cohesive genre but are rather defined by their “particular kind of oppositional and critical energy or spirit.” While the roots of dystopian narrative stretch as far back as Menippean satire, it coalesced into its present form primarily during the past century in response to the social, political, and economic horrors of modernity, most recently gaining more momentum as a reaction to the political conservatism of the 1980s and 1990s. M. Keith Booker characterizes dystopic literature as a cautionary opposition to the possible negative consequences of unfettered utopian thought and as generally critiquing social or political systems by exposing their flaws and contradictions. Dystopia’s unique ability to comment critically on larger systemic problems rather than on singular causes of modern terrors “invites the creation of alternative worlds in which the historical spacetime of the author can be re-presented in a way that foregrounds the articulation of its economic, political, and cultural dimensions.” Through creating alternative worlds that illuminate and critique the systemic causes of current social and ecological ills, Garcia’s works from 2000 to 2004 can be considered dystopic narratives.

Garcia introduces critical reflection and visual polysemy into the fantastical *Dream Factory Escape Pod* (Figure 4), which problematizes the conventional happy delusion of Disneyland and illuminates its reliance on seductive, sugary capitalism at the implied cost of the natural world. At the center of the painting is a foreboding and biomorphic black structure that resembles a cross between Disneyland’s Sleeping Beauty Castle with its distinctive towers (Figure 5) and a factory with multiple smokestacks. Small, regular black drips of paint in the structure’s interior visually suggest jail cells, while the smokestacks spew an orange substance in
shapes that recall both the fireworks used in nightly Disneyland celebrations as well as palm trees. What appear to be black roots or tentacles issuing from the bottom of the structure seem to be invading or feeding off of a pile of gelatinous pink and chocolate frosting, as well as giving the same treatment to a deer-like animal in the right foreground that has trees growing out of its head. Another tentacle emerges from a shape on the left side of the structure that is suggestive of an insect head, connecting to a series of figures that resemble costumed Disney characters (Figure 5) or perhaps a prototypical nuclear family visiting Disneyland. Smaller black tentacles connect these figures to another figure on the bottom left of a tentacle-armed girl with her eyes closed, holding some sort of drink that reaches up to her face with its own black tentacles.

In her artistic practice, Garcia exhibits an ambivalent relationship with Disneyland, reminiscing about her youthful obsession with visiting it and calling it “a successful utopia” in various interviews, as well as exhibiting forty works from her illustrated version of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* at the Walt Disney Family Museum in 2013. García’s illustrations for *Alice’s Adventures* display the same formal language, graphic line work, and decorative sensibility as her paintings, but appear to contain little of the usual sociopolitical content present in her stand-alone artwork. Fairytales, as well as Disneyland and Disney films and artwork, have clearly had an enormous stylistic influence on Garcia’s work. Nevertheless, Garcia still appears to be at odds with broader sociopolitical implications inherent in Disneyland as a cultural construct, variously describing it as “a giant art installation that had dark qualities” that she eventually realized was “all fake landscapes and fake happiness.” The visual connections Garcia introduces in *Dream Factory Escape Pod* work in concert with its title to suggest disturbing alternate truths that displace Disneyland as merely an innocent fantasy world and effective escape from reality. Since Garcia regularly uses castles as “an obvious symbol of
Empire or the ruling class” in her later work, her recasting of the Sleeping Beauty Castle here as a factory or jail suggests a structure masquerading as a seemingly obtainable way for everyday people to experience the fantasy of being mythological moneyed royalty, but that in reality only mimics the economic enslavement of their daily lives. The use of the factory imagery in conjunction with the consumption of deer and trees implies that Disneyland exemplifies a larger ecological problem of obliterating wildlife and forests in order to create artificial man-made structures at the behest of capitalism, and contaminates the environment by expelling its celebratory pollution. The massive stockpile of frosting with which the castle/factory/insect-like creature entices its visitors, visually echoed in the drink held by the girl at the bottom left of the image, suggests that a similarly alluring but ultimately nutrition-less content disguised by metaphorical fat and sugar disappointing lies at the heart of Disney’s purported fantasy escape.

If Garcia’s works exhibit mixed feelings about Disneyland, there appears to be absolutely no ambiguity in her desire to present suburbia and its attendant social problems as symptomatic of a failed utopia. Her experience growing up as a racial and ideological outsider in white suburbia perhaps allowed her to perceive with better clarity the ills lurking behind the safe and perfect suburban façade that more outwardly conformist suburbanites might not have readily noticed. In his landmark history of the subject, Kenneth T. Jackson stresses suburbia’s ideological importance to American culture: “Suburbia symbolizes the fullest, most unadulterated embodiment of contemporary culture; it is a manifestation of such fundamental characteristics of American society as conspicuous consumption, a reliance upon the private automobile, upward mobility, the separation of the family into nuclear units, the widening division between work and leisure, and a tendency toward racial and economic exclusiveness.”

While the term suburbia is hard to pinpoint definitively as it has historically been applied to a
wide swath of disparate places, and there is certainly regional, demographic, and economic variation among specific suburbs, essential similarities nevertheless exist and can be considered representative of suburbia as a whole. Jackson charts the growth and increasing popularity of American suburbs and peripheral towns beginning in the early nineteenth century, identifying a sociological shift in the late nineteenth century where middle- and upper-class cultures increasingly embraced living in the suburbs as a way to protect their private home lives from the increasing perception of urban centers as dangerous and rife with pollution, immigrants, and vice. This desire to maintain a safe and by extension demographically homogenous domestic haven later manifested itself in racially-motivated zoning laws beginning in the early twentieth century and increased “white flight” to the suburbs as a reaction to desegregation and fear of racially diverse inner cities.

As half-Mexican, Garcia experienced racial discrimination in the suburbs, as well as apathy, depression, and drug addiction – all social problems that suburbia purports to keep out of its territory by physically distancing itself from the inner city, to which suburbanites feel these problems exclusively belong. Calling suburbia a failed utopia in interviews, Garcia describes it as a place that is designed to be free of drugs, crime, and danger, as well as the supposed ideal environment to raise a family, “but what you actually have are overweight, xenophobic pharmaceutical zombies that will be the first to die when the oil runs out. Suburbia is Capitalism’s best invention, and it totally sucks.” Although the unseen dark social underbelly of the suburbs is troubling, what seems to unsettle Garcia the most about suburbia is its symbolic abdication of the real, problematic world and its ultimate ineffectuality as an escape from reality: “It’s the pretense that you can escape bad things by walling yourself in from the rest of humanity that disturbs me. The suburbs are like an extremely elaborate denial plan, but the plan is not
really working.” Similar to her subversive presentation of Disneyland as a hollow and deceptive fantasy placebo, the fantastic alternate worlds created in Garcia’s paintings also introduce unseen truths of contemporary American suburbia and complicate its traditional cultural definition as a safe, utopic enclave.

Since Garcia tends to concentrate on painting images of nature and rarely incorporates man-made structures into her work in conscious subversive opposition to the modern world, paintings specifically addressing the failed utopia of suburbia are somewhat difficult to identify. However, two of Garcia’s works from the early 2000s, 2001’s *Parasite Eradication Squad* (Figure 6) and 2003’s *Domestic Surveillance Program* (Figure 7), challenge the prevailing notion of suburbia as a safe escape for the middle class. In *Parasite Eradication Squad*, a central figure wields an oversized mallet and pokes with one finger the black and cartoonish elephantine head of a supine, diseased-looking composite creature with a mottled human torso and legs, while black liquid and tentacles erupt from its torso. Five pink and presumably healthy iterations of the same elephantine head float behind the girl in seeming support of her activity, while a cartoon squirrel sadly holds a drooping flower in the right bottom corner. Suburban houses are visible in the background, mostly abstract silhouettes except for one house rendered in more detail with a delineated window and door at the extreme right of the image. The implication here seems to be that suburbia is not as safe or healthy as its inhabitants pretend, but is instead plagued by some sort of parasitic infestation, representing an internal disorder rather than an external threat like the ones against which suburbia purports to guard. It is difficult to resist reading an additional commentary on race relations in suburbia into this work, as the diseased figure’s head is black, whereas the girl and the healthy floating elephantine heads appear to be a Caucasian hue. The identical form of the floating elephantine heads with their happily glazed
expressions can be read as a visualization of the demographic and ideological homogeneity of suburbanites. The girl’s overly sexualized outfit, which displays a portion of her underwear and includes high-heeled boots, suggests that a suburban environment is not as effective as its residents hope at preventing children from engaging too soon in behavior they associate with the perceived vice and immorality of the faraway inner city. The squirrel and flower at the bottom of the image serve as a reminder of the natural flora and fauna that the creation of the suburban environment has displaced, and implies that suburbia also considers them to be parasites that must similarly be destroyed.

Set against a suburban backdrop of identical green houses, a continuous stretch of lawn, and a curved lane vanishing into the horizon, *Domestic Surveillance Program* pictures a bug-eyed egg-shaped creature with human legs and black tentacles seemingly leering at the back of an unaware woman or girl holding a duck protectively and surrounded by cartoon animal toys and sinister black boxes. This painting is from Garcia’s 2003 solo show *Operation:Opticon*, which addressed what the artist perceived as Americans’ eager willingness to abdicate their privacy and agency in exchange for governmental and military protection from the country’s enemies during the beginning of the Iraq War. A recurring visual theme throughout Garcia’s works from this show are cute toys manufactured by the military in which surveillance equipment has been imbedded, used to gather information on the public as well as to distract them from a frightening wartime reality. The jumble of toy animals, presumably containing military surveillance equipment, and sinister black boxes imply a domestic suburban environment where citizens allow themselves to be tricked into feeling safe, while in actuality their every move is transmitted back to a watchful and not necessarily benevolent government, represented by the egg-shaped creature. As in *Parasite Eradication Squad*, Garcia shatters the
comforting illusion that suburbia is an inviolable shelter that has the ability to protect its inhabitants from outside forces, including government invasion of the assumed privacy of the suburban enclave or potential ramifications from increasingly intensifying international conflicts.

Garcia’s experiences growing up in the suburbs of LA focused her attention on how ineffectual the supposed protection of a physically isolated suburbia actually is in insulating its inhabitants from the problems, in particular drug use and addiction, which suburbanites associate exclusively with distant metropolitan areas. Describing the suburban youth with which she was familiar, Garcia has said that “everyone that I knew was a total fucked-up drug addict, going nowhere, depressed, with this perfect veneer of suburbia, but everyone had the same fucked-up problems that they would have in the inner city.”62 Several studies from the last two decades bear out Garcia’s perception of the high rate of substance abuse in suburban youth, and actually confirm that drug use is more common among teens from affluent circumstances and suburban settings than it is among teens from less affluent, rural, or even urban environments.63 Identifying the boredom and privilege associated with suburban affluence as possible causes of drug use in suburbia, Garcia notes that suburbia is “supposed to be the safest place to raise kids, the perfect environment. There’s supposed to be less crime and fewer drugs than in the city. But in reality, people there have addictions and other serious problems. They get so bored with their overprivileged lives that they find ways to self-destruct.”64

The boredom and consequent self-destruction through drugs of overprivileged suburbanites can be seen in *Shine Your Teeth Till Meaningless* (Figure 8), which features a woman with an elaborate and glittered hairstyle shaking multiple red pills from a bottle into her waiting hand. Incapacitated by some sort of pharmaceuticals, the woman appears to be both sweating and drooling as several other red pills fall from her mouth. More pills and outlined
drips of liquid decorate the flat form of her floor-length dress, which recalls the silhouettes of traditional princess dresses in classic Disney films. This painting was part of Garcia’s 2004 Ultraviolenceland show, aimed in part as a critique of the continued American state of fantastical denial of the violence and spectacle of the Iraq War. Throughout the works in this show, Garcia depicts an excessively affluent fictional city that celebrates recreational violence, where “princesses trapped in giant dresses slash wrists and down pills, not entirely happy with their pristine yet ultraviolent world.”65 Although Garcia’s intent with this work originally may have been to comment on the self-destructiveness of a higher socioeconomic class of citizens than is often found in typical middle-American suburbia, her critique can still be extended to include similar suburban behavior. Visually supporting the application of this critique to suburbia, the uninterrupted background in Shine Your Teeth Till Meaningless of a collaged fragment of homely yellow floral wallpaper is certainly more suggestive of a middle-class suburban interior room or bedroom setting than it is of a wealthy and opulent interior.

Taken together, the domestic wallpaper, the figure of the woman, and the prominence of pills as the drug of choice bring to mind the over prescription, overuse, and abuse of tranquilizers largely by white middle-class American women in the mid- to late twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, antidrug crusaders, the popular press, and the medical establishment adopted the prior class and race biases of the temperance movement that identified society’s problem drug users as nonwhite and poor, while ignoring the existence of a growing contingent of white, middle-class drug users being legally prescribed potentially addictive pharmaceuticals by their physicians.66 By the 1970s, national surveys reported that not only was Valium the single most prescribed brand of medicine in the United States, but also that it was used by women at twice the rate of men, earning it the nickname “mother’s little helper” after the 1966 Rolling Stones
Shine Your Teeth Till Meaningless conjures up this history of prescription drug abuse by white suburban middle-class women while illustrating its debilitating effects and ultimate ineffectiveness as a method to escape reality. Garcia depicts a harrowing portrait of legal suburban drug dependency in the pale, sweating, and drooling woman who peers suspiciously behind her out of heavy-lidded eyes. The hand-lettered title phrase within the painting implies that the figure is reduced by her dependency on pills to engaging in a compulsive and ultimately pointless activity akin to “shining her teeth,” an action that neither seems to bring her any true pleasure or escape from her overprivileged boredom, nor affects the world in a meaningful way. Drug use also appears to be an ideologically flawed method of resistance to unhappiness and dissatisfaction with a privileged existence, as “far from being evidence of rejecting bourgeois consumer values, the drug culture might mirror them: buying a chemical solution to life problems is hardly a move into a different reality.”

The Valium panic of the 1960s and 70s, the subsequent demonization of the “white collar drug scene” by the American press, and the introduction of more socially acceptable second-wave anti-anxiety and antidepressant medications in the late 1980s caused these newer pharmaceuticals largely to replace tranquilizers as the legal drugs of choice for white middle-class Americans. Garcia further explores this continuing American problem of over prescription and overuse of modern pharmaceuticals in her Pharmaceuticools series, consisting of four sequential panels comprising text and image created for the annual art anthology BLAB!. Each panel features a couplet with an internal rhyming scheme that together forms a cohesive poetic, fictional parody of pharmaceutical ad campaigns, juxtaposed with images of overmedicated figures illustrating the disturbing effects of the psychotropic medications espoused by the chirpy accompanying text. In the third panel of the series (Figure 9), a heavy-
A lidded and happily relaxed woman floats above the ground, surrounded by smiling anthropomorphized pill bottles labeled Ambien, Zoloft, Halcion, and Oxycontin. Penciled text to the side of her reads “I don’t care about anything!” while similar sentiments including “I like myself!” and “Whee” accompany an equally blissed-out and floating egg-shaped figure below her. The fourth panel of this series (Figure 10) features a nearly unconscious woman astride a child’s inflatable anthropomorphic pool toy, her head and eyes rolled back in stupification and her tongue hanging out of her open mouth to catch the cascade of pills raining onto her from a black tube above her. Like the third panel, she is surrounded by more cheerfully beaming pill bottles labeled Ativan, Xanax, Norco, and Prozac.

Garcia’s entire Pharmaceuticools series and these two panels in particular reinforce Félix Guattari’s 1989 observation that when it comes to drug use and abuse, the consumption of illegal substances is less cause for worry than the overuse of legal pharmaceuticals: “Drugs are being consumed in enormous amounts, and it is the family practitioner who is prescribing most of them.” On the most immediate level, this series as a whole addresses the mid-twentieth to early twenty-first-century predisposition in American medical discourse to overmedicate men and women putatively in order to mitigate legitimate psychological disorders, but with the concealed motivation being the promise of financial gain. Linking Garcia’s critique of overmedication to the overall theme of rampant and destructive capitalism in her larger body of work, Doug Harvey notes that “the tragic Goth self-destructiveness of her bulimic, pharmaceutical-popping waifs is subtly but insistently recast as coerced complicity in a larger scheme of systematic exploitative victimization – capitalism by any other name.” Through its imagery of legally drugged-out and impaired women and accompanying text satirizing medical advertising, Garcia’s Pharmaceuticools series implicates the drug manufacturing industry as a sinister force beholden
to capitalism that urges citizens to self-medicate in the ultimate pursuit of revenue. However, Garcia’s critique here is leveled not only at the corporate entities encouraging and profiting from the over prescription of antianxiety and antidepressant medications, but also at the casual desire of Americans to pop a pill as an easy and instantaneous lifestyle solution. Whether to treat problems that pharmaceutical advertising has falsely convinced them they suffer from or simply to check out of an increasingly disturbing modern reality, “the huge secret which the pharmaceutical industry has discovered and exploited mercilessly is a sobering one: North Americans will swallow anything, whether in the form of promises or of technicolour pills.”

Garcia presents the abuse of legal pharmaceuticals as an ineffective coping mechanism to escape terrible realities in two other works from her 2004 *Ultraviolenceland* show, *Sleep and Destroy* (Figure 11) and *Black Kraken Hijack* (Figure 12). In *Sleep and Destroy*, a supine and drooling woman on the bottom left holding a black flag appears to be asleep or unconscious, presumably from the effect of pills from the three white rabbits holding pill bottles that attend to her. She is surrounded by several disembodied floating female-rabbit hybrid heads whose closed eyes and drooling open mouths mirror her intoxicated stupor. To the right of the painting, a group of hunched and ghoulish vampire creatures ominously march toward her, while a lone vampire stands atop an overturned smiling house or castle gruesomely consuming the intact body of another white rabbit. It is clear that the woman and rabbits are in imminent danger from the vampires, and that her incapacitation by drugs will prevent her from any action that might save her. She holds up a black flag that can be interpreted as a symbol of the anarchist movement, a negation indicative of “a mood of anger and outrage at all the hideous crimes against humanity…at the insult to human intelligence implied in the pretenses, hypocrisies, and cheap chicaneries of governments.” Alternately, the way the figure is holding the flag suggests it is
flag of surrender, implying her previous surrender to this situation and that her decision to escape reality through pharmaceuticals was a conscious and premeditated response. Even if her abdication of agency and ability to protect herself through narcoleptic addiction started out on a smaller and more manageable scale, *Sleep and Destroy* suggests that the desire to escape reality through drugs is a slippery slope that ends in harm and destruction. Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor observe that drugs “offer to the user the prospects of a real escape. What we buy initially is a solution to short-term problems, a form of relaxation, an easy mechanism for changing moods and this is all the occasional user gets.” But as occasional use turns into a habitual and unhealthy psychological coping mechanism to blot out a frightening world, addicts are increasingly unable to operate effectively in reality, even when necessary for self-preservation. Whether the drug is alcohol, a street drug, or a legally prescribed and ostensibly safe pharmaceutical, “they all have in common the aim of going out of play. In this sense drug use is an escape from reality.”

In *Black Kraken Hijack*, a heavy-lidded woman in the upper right corner holds onto a swan in flight while simultaneously shaking black pills from a bottle in her left hand into her open mouth, tongue extended to catch the falling pills. Below her at ground level, violence and death reign in the form of three headless floating rabbit-like creatures, arms out in seemingly ignored supplication. Black blood spurts from the creatures’ broken spinal cords, while their severed heads bleed on the ground nearby. In the foreground, a large black kraken is wrapped around and appears to be attacking a smiling anthropomorphic castle, while another black kraken lurks behind some defoliated and apparently dead trees in a dirty background of dingy browns and yellows. The woman’s face is turned away from the disturbing scene below her as she escapes the melee both physically with the swan and psychologically by downing her bottle of
pills. Here, as in *Sleep and Destroy*, Garcia presents abuse of legal drugs as an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the brutal truth of the real world, resulting in the separation of self and world and an abdication of any agency to address or positively affect systemic sociopolitical problems. As Jacques Derrida observes, the drug addict “cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community…he escapes into a world of simulacrum and fiction….The rhetoric of fantasy that is at the root of any prohibition of drugs: drugs make us lose any sense of true reality….His is a pleasure taken in an experience without truth.” In *Black Kraken Hijack* and *Sleep and Destroy*, Garcia visually demonstrates both central figures’ retreat from their objective realities through underscoring each woman’s act of escape into a drug-fueled utopic but fictive psychological space.

Ultimately, the paintings discussed above reflect Garcia’s attempt to shed light on the silenced and imperceptible trend of Americans to retreat from the unhappiness and fear of modern reality through the inhabitation of dangerously artificial and isolated fictional utopic spaces, specifically Disneyland, suburbia, and drug addiction, that are divorced from the real world. All three of these artificial utopic spaces can be considered simulacra, a term and concept that has been discussed since Plato in regard to the arts, generally in negative terms as a denigration of the real and in direct opposition to mimetic art, which has long been considered to affirm reality through producing visual copies of it. In contrast to mimetic representations of reality, the simulacrum was considered a representation without a preceding referent based in reality, whose existence threatens the traditional conception of artistic representation as a copy of reality and questions the viewer’s ability to discern between reality and more fictive artistic representations untethered from reality. This definition and negative view of simulacra largely persisted until the 1960s when philosophers and historians, in particular Deleuze, Foucault, and
Baudrillard, reformulated the concept of simulacra in response to modernity as containing a positive force that denies and supersedes the idea of the original and copy and displaces the notion of a privileged point of view. As Michael Camille notes: “Instead of a conquest of the real, a simulacral history of art would be the story of escape from the real in the realms of imagination and fantasy, a story of introjection as well as projection, of desire as well as fear.”

By exemplifying Americans’ escape from reality into fantastic dystopian spaces, and illuminating the desires and fears that are attendant with these escapes, Garcia’s paintings fit well into Camille’s simulacral refiguring of art history.

Baudrillard extended the modern concept of simulacra into the sociopolitical and mass media realms, theorizing three increasingly powerful orders of simulacra. Baudrillard also maintained that as the foremost example of a hyperrealistic culture, America contains no second-order simulacra, but embodies a clash solely between the first- and third-level simulacral orders. For Baudrillard, Disneyland “is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation,” incorporating counterfeits (first order), illusions and fantasy worlds (second order), and embodying a distinctly American reversal of values that authenticates Disneyland as the real world (third order). Suburbia can be seen as a third-order simulacrum where a utopic narrative has been fashioned through consensual illusion as a microcosm of the American dream, representing a hyperreality that “is no longer that of a dream or of fantasy, of a beyond or within, [but] that of a hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself.” Similarly, the state of mind induced by pharmaceuticals represents a third-order simulacrum in its creation of a psychologically utopic space for the user that “provides a glimpse of an alternative reality or enhances the existing one.”
Garcia’s fantastic presentation of Disneyland, suburbia, and drug addiction as simulacra is likely, as Carlo McCormick puts it, “driven by the grand spectacle of our contemporary world.”83 This spectacle is reflected in Baudrillard’s conception of America as a hyperreality that is convinced it is a perfectly realized utopia of “everything the others have dreamt of – justice, plenty, rule of law, wealth, freedom,” a fiction of self-reference and narcissism that continues to mindlessly forge ahead in silent indifference of potential disaster.84 The American populace is encouraged to accept unquestioningly the premise of their cultural reality as an achieved utopia, despite the increasingly disturbing evidence (wars, environmental destruction, economic disasters, political and social unrest) that runs counter to this dangerously fictional narrative.

Garcia’s paintings disrupt the veracity of this American utopic hyperreality by exposing multiple and contradictory truths, while simultaneously encouraging viewers to break the ideological grip of specific simulacra that create ineffective alternate hyperrealities. For Garcia, continuing to futilely and irresponsibility inhabit simulacra on a broad scale will inevitably lead to the dystopic chaos and violence she depicts in her work. Further, remaining ignorant of reality in these ways produces a compliant and easily manipulated populace that is unaware of the destruction and violence currently happening to the environment, and further distances people from the poor sociopolitical choices being made based on capitalistic impulses and the fiction of American utopia.

Garcia’s work from 2000 to 2004 acts as a wake-up call that any attempted escape from the current harsh truth of reality is futile and unproductive, and implies that remaining present and aware of reality empowers Americans to resist and change destructive political and cultural trajectories. Her dystopic, apocalyptic paintings are intended to serve as preventative warnings by depicting a future that shouldn’t have to happen, rendered cute and glittery to spread the
message further than just through the academic art world. Garcia’s focus on the direness of what Baudrillard calls “survival issues” carries with it the implication of our ability to survive, just as her alternate realities have the effect of reinforcing the existence and importance of reality: “Certainly, this whole panoply of survival issues – dieting, ecology, saving the sequoias, seals or the human race – tends to prove that we are very much alive (just as all imaginary fairy-tales tend to prove that the real world is very real).” As unlikely as it may seem at first glance, Garcia’s message contains the hope that informing and cautioning her viewers about the current and future state of America will ultimately have a positive effect by enabling awareness and change on a large scale. Carlo McCormick observes: “Resisting outright negativity, Camille Rose Garcia reflects the methods of our madness back at us. This is both blinding and illuminating…Garcia does not succumb to her unlikely mythologies for the sake of escapism; she cajoles us into making a leap of faith with her precisely so that we can see – through her alternative reality – how very grim and ultimately misguided is the consensus reality we so easily accept.” Garcia’s paintings challenge us to abandon our own personal escapist simulacra in order to help shape our seemingly bleak collective circumstances into an improved future reality.
Figure 1: Camille Rose Garcia, *Cherrygirls vs. Contamination*, 2000. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 30”x60”.

Figure 2: Camille Rose Garcia, *Who’s Afraid of the Peppermint Man*, 2002. Acrylic, oil, and glitter on wood, 32”x48”.

Figure 3: Camille Rose Garcia, *Who’s Afraid of the Peppermint Man (Detail)*, 2002. Acrylic, watercolor, and glitter on paper, 14”x14”.

Figure 4: Camille Rose Garcia, *Dream Factory Escape Pod*, 2001. Acrylic, oil, and glitter on wood, 72”x96”.

Figure 5: The classic Disney characters welcome visitors outside Sleeping Beauty Castle at Disneyland in Anaheim, California.

Figure 6: Camille Rose Garcia, *Parasite Eradication Squad*, 2001. Acrylic, oil, and glitter on wood, 35”x48”.

Figure 7: Camille Rose Garcia, *Domestic Surveillance Program*, 2003. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 24”x36”.

Figure 8: Camille Rose Garcia, *Shine Your Teeth Till Meaningless*, 2004. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 22”x15”.

Figure 9: Camille Rose Garcia, Pharmaceuticools (Panel 3), 2002. Acrylic and watercolor on paper, 14”x21”.

Figure 10: Camille Rose Garcia, *Pharmaceuticools* (Panel 4), 2002. Acrylic and watercolor on paper, 14”x21”.

Figure 11: Camille Rose Garcia, *Sleep and Destroy*, 2004. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 24”x48”.

Figure 12: Camille Rose Garcia, *Black Kraken Hijack*, 2004. Acrylic and glitter on wood, 48”x48”.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


ENDNOTES

1 Although “lowbrow” is a contested and problematic term to describe this diverse group of artists and styles spanning at present nearly seven decades, I will nevertheless use it throughout this paper, as it is the most consistently and widely used term. Other terms used and proposed have included “pop surrealism” (perhaps the next most-used term after lowbrow and sometimes used to describe a subsequent subset of the lowbrow movement), “no-brow,” “uni-brow,” “underground,” “cartoon expressionism,” “cartoons,” “imagist,” “narrative noir,” “pervasivism,” “cartoon pluralism,” “psychedelic punk,” “Kustom Kulture,” “retro illustrational,” and “new contemporary.” See Lowey and Prince, Graphic Art of the Underground, 187; Harvey, “Pictures from the Unibrow Revolution”; Anderson, “Viva la Resistance,” i; McCormick, “Notes on the Underground,” vi; and Jordan, Weirdo Deluxe, 11.


5 Williams, “Update,” 4.

6 Marziani and Mazzanti, Pop Surrealism, 85-86.

7 Garcia, Tragic Kingdom, 125.


9 “Camille Rose Garcia,” 42.

10 Garcia, Tragic Kingdom, 127; and Lowey and Prince, Graphic Art of the Underground, 176-80.

11 “Camille Rose Garcia,” 42; and Garcia, Tragic Kingdom, 127.

12 Garcia, The Saddest Place on Earth, 18.

13 Ibid., 32; and Garcia, “CV.”


17 Ibid.


19 “I sometimes feel that I’m the only one interested in sociopolitical commentary in the lowbrow scene.” Garcia, quoted in Solis, “Army of Darkness,” 46.

20 Garcia, The Saddest Place on Earth, 24.


23 Jordan, Weirdo Deluxe, 79.

24 Lowey and Prince, Graphic Art of the Underground, 190-201.


26 “It’s that blank-slate viewer I want to communicate to, because they don’t have all those rules in their head, and if I can communicate to them, I’m doing a good job.” Garcia, quoted in Knapp, “Camille Rose Garcia,” 20. See also Warren, “Cooking with Camille,” 5; and Solis, “Army of Darkness,” 49.


28 Harvey, “Pictures from the Unibrow Revolution.”

29 Ibid.


33 Kun, “New Chicano Movement.”
“If your work is only about identity, a lot of people can’t relate to it. I want people to care about my work because I want them to care about the world, about the Earth, about extinction.” Quoted in Kun, “New Chicano Movement.” See also Gleason, “Becoming Animal,” 8.


Jackson, *Fantasy,* 3.

Ibid., 4.

Ibid., 69.

Ibid., 23.


Booker, *Dystopian Literature,* 3.

Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky,* xi-xii; and Baccolini, “Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction,” 518.

Booker, *Dystopian Literature,* 3.

Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky,* xii.

Bello, “Interview;” “Camille Rose Garcia,” 45; and “Camille Rose Garcia: Down the Rabbit Hole.”

According to a 2013 interview with Garcia about the exhibit, while the Walt Disney Company has to date not commented on her work, both the Walt Disney Family Museum (a separate entity from the Walt Disney Company) and its associated Disney family (in particular Walt Disney's grandson Walter Miller) appreciate LA lowbrow art in general and embrace the dark undertones in Garcia’s larger body of work. Burchby, “Camille Rose Garcia on Getting Dark with Disney;” and “About Us.”

Littlefield, “It’s a Sad World After All,” 88; and Solis, “Army of Darkness,” 46.

Garcia, *The Saddest Place on Earth,* 90.

Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier,* 4.

Ibid., 4-6.

Ibid., 46-72.

Ibid., 241-42 and 289-90.

Dacheux, “Flower of Evil,” 78; and Bello, “Interview.”

“Camille Rose Garcia,” 45.

Chin, “The Saddest Place on Earth?”


Garcia, *The Saddest Place on Earth,* 64.

Bello, “Interview.”

McMahon and Luthar, “Patterns and Correlates of Substance Use among Affluent, Suburban High School Students,” 72.


Garcia, *The Saddest Place on Earth,* 90.

Herzberg, “The Pill You Love Can Turn on You,” 82-84.

Ibid., 79.


Ibid., 146.


78 Ibid., 41.
79 Baudrillard, *America*, 104.
81 Baudrillard, “Orders of Simulacra,” 142.
82 Cohen and Taylor, *Escape Attempts*, 146.
84 Baudrillard, *America*, 77 and 28-44.
85 Ibid., 42.