

THE INAUSPICIOUS PRESENT

By

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A PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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To my MFA committee, especially Julia Morrisroe, for never letting me be content, and challenging me to always raise the bar for myself.

And to God and Christ whose patient guidance has taught me I have nothing to fear for the future, but that I should forget His leading in the past.

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Summary of Project in Lieu of Thesis
Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts

THE INAUSPICIOUS PRESENT

Donald Francis Keefe

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Chair: Julia Morrisroe
Major: Art

“Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.” - Luke 21:26

The Inauspicious Present is an exhibition of drawings that explore the sense of foreboding for the future that exists within the malaise of contemporary culture. Inspired by the Biblical Tower of Babel story, and informed by history and current events, this work seeks to relate the present to the past, with the intent of pointing toward a, yet to come, universal decay.

In the tradition of romantic era painters, the drawings contain anachronistic images of ruined architecture, as well as imagery of crashed aircraft, and natural disasters. The works portray an ominous scenario that darkly reflects the images of catastrophe that have become familiar through media and reproduced imagery.

The Inauspicious Present embodies a critique of the hubris of humankind, often represented by piles of debris that densely populate the canvas, desolate landscapes,

solitary heaps, and half standing structures, drawing parallels to biblical and mythological stories such as that of Icarus.

In these works the natural color of the unprimed canvas acts as the light within the drawing and the raw canvas records every stain and mark. Working on this surface is similar to executing a water color painting in that the lights must be defined in advance because once the canvas is soiled, it is impossible to reclaim the light. In this way, the method in which these works are created demonstrates the obfuscation of history and the decay of absolutes that accompanies the post-modern condition.

Conceptually, the works are dire, and there are moments that it is evident that I am striving to find hope in the wreckage. Hope to alter the course of the present, and hope in a future that will transcend the failures of today.

Perhaps an individual can't save the world, but they can "*work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling*" Philippians 2:12.

PROJECT REPORT

“Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.” - Luke 21:26

In every direction, flames rose just above the horizon line.

It was a hot, dry, southern California summer day in 1994. My family was conservative in our use of air conditioning due to the regions notoriously high electricity costs. We had installed an outdoor jacuzzi the previous winter, but we kept the water cold in the summer months. I was anxious to cool down, and, ignoring the air quality warnings that recommended residents stay indoors, I headed toward the backyard to cool down in the three-foot deep pool.

Drawing back the blinds that were shut against the harsh sun, I was astonished at the sight. It seemed to be snowing, but it was gray and seemed lighter in the air.

Opening the sliding glass door, and pushing aside the screen, I stepped outside and was overwhelmed by the smell of burning. My eyes got irritated, my breath became short, and I realized the falling substance was ash.

Still looking to splash around in some cool water, I walked slowly towards the jacuzzi, surveying with wonder the power of this gray matter to dull the color of our terra cotta roofed suburban home, and subdue the green of our sprinkler maintained lawn. Everything in my vision was slowly becoming unified under this layer of dust.

I reached the edge of the tub, and, turning my gaze upon the surface of the water, was surprised to see it had also turned a murky slate color.

My reverie turned to attention and I sought to find the cause of all this ash. Climbing up the backyard fence and looking across an undeveloped dirt field of small

knolls covered in parched yellow grasses and tumble weeds, I saw flames leaping up from the horizon. The flames must have been very large to be visible from such a distance, and the fire must have consumed many acres to have produced such a miasma in the air.

I dashed across the backyard and climbed the west facing fence. Here, to my surprise, my view was met with another far-off wall of flames. My alarm turned to panic. This gray, with its dull, equalizing ability, was the herald of something portentous upon the horizon. Moving to the south facing gate, I climbed it too, and was again met with flames, though their distance more estimable because they were upon the outlying hills.

Realizing that our small city was surrounded by brush fires, I feared inevitable doom. My mother, being familiar through experience with the fire season, comforted me. Our family put together a picnic, joining many other families, in what later became a kind of neighborhood summer outing. We drove to a highway overpass to watch regional fire fighter crews aided by National Guard helicopters and C-130s fight the fires.

I distinctly remember the sun, obscured by the smoke, appearing dim and red.

Our house didn't burn down, and neither did anyone's I knew. Brush fires became a normal part of our summer season. Even though the initial shock of the sight wore off, I still distinctly remember how the gray ash covered everything, dulling the color, like snow mutes sound. For a moment, under that darkened sun, and in that gray snow, everything stood quietly on the verge of possible non-existence.

"Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." - Luke 21:26

The Inauspicious Present explores the sense of foreboding for the future that exists within the malaise of contemporary culture. It is informed by my interests in mythology, revelation, history, and politics. The initial inspiration came from the biblical Tower of Babel story, and stories of Icarus, Phaethon, and Narcissus. Moral lessons about conceit and arrogance abound, personal failures, natural disasters, the economic collapse, are all evidence of internal and external forces that overwhelm us physically and leave us emotionally vexed. Images of ruin conjure up reflections on hubristic tendencies, and embody uncertainty and trepidation.

In addition to these inspirations, the drawings are filtered through my belief system and are an introspective investigation into a fear of failure and loss. Because of the duality of commenting on the state of western society, and expressing my own state of mind, the work rests on the edge of introspection and detachment; of being a representation of content and illustration of subject.

My goal is to create work that resonates with what I believe is the unspoken despondency shared with the universal sub-conscience of western civilization.

I am visually and conceptually influenced by a range of artists, but with this project I am especially indebted to the *capriccio* paintings of Panini (PLATE 1), Northern European Romanticism, Hubert Robert (PLATE 2), Thomas Cole (PLATE 3) and the Hudson River painters. These all created fantastic, anachronistic pictures that combined staffage from various times and places in a way that negated both of these contextualizing factors for the present.

In the Romantic tradition, ruins were often contrasted against an encompassing and intimidating landscape to point out the problems attributed to industrialization,

atheism, and scientific rationalism. In Caspar David Friedrich's, *The Abbey in the Oakwood* (PLATE 4), a funeral procession is overshadowed by a mystical winter scene with a leafless oak forest, abbey ruins, and limited light source. This painting evokes the sublime, and conjures ideas of mortality, spirituality, and time. Like other Romantic era artists, this work embodies a call for a renewal of spirituality by pointing out the limits of reason and the finiteness of human life. In recognizing the existential questions that ruins can raise, George Simmel wrote, "The aesthetic value of the ruin combines the disharmony, the eternal becoming of the soul struggling against itself, with the satisfaction of form, the firm limitedness, of the work of art. For this reason, the metaphysical-aesthetic charm of the ruin disappears when not enough remains of it to let us feel the upward-leading tendency."¹

Ominously dark and cold hues, along with mystifying grays would create the sublime sense of foreboding that exists in works by Romanticists like Friedrich. In Anselm Kiefer's work, there is often a sense of weight tied to a specific historical backdrop, but also an elevating notion to escape it. Writing about Kiefer's use of gray, Donald Kuspit comments that "Colorless gray is the color of doubt,"² and that "everything dissolves in the gray, obscured into oblivion [...] it cancels into invisibility more than it allows to become visible, creating a sense of enigma that adds to the spectacle of the space by cloaking it in uncertainty, and suggesting despair."³ "All-encompassing gray-announces the failure of Western civilization as a humanizing

¹ George Simmel, "The Ruin." Quoted in Dillon, Brian. *Ruins*. Whitechapel Gallery. MIT Press. Cambridge, MA. 2011. Pg.23 "The Ruin." George Simmel. 1911.

² I Celant, Germano. *Anselm Kiefer: Salt of the Earth*. Skira Editore S.p.A. Milano, Italy. 2011. pg. 181

³ Ibid. pg. 179

endeavor...”⁴ In seeking to create the kind of temporally displaced sensibility that exists in the Friederich and Kiefer’s work, I adopted a similar palette.

Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility.”⁵ explores the negation of aura from images. Through the use of these familiar pictures, my drawings frame the ambivalence with which we recognize that any place at any time can suffer similar calamities.

During the past three years of research, certain elements repeatedly appeared in art work. Beginning with a series of drawings depicting collapsed toy block towers, a visual language began to develop that used hard edges and regular forms to suggest order, but, when shown in disarranged piles, hinted at the struggle between order and chaos.

Untitled Calamity #4 (PLATE 5) and *#5* (PLATE 6), are examples of a series of diptychs that had one panel painting of the toy block ruin, and the other, a painting of one familiar images of a recent disaster. The disaster scenes offered context and the blocks began to suggest a form of sterilized information, inhumanly extracted from the ruin. These early works were the beginning of the use of emotionally distancing grays, and an absence of figures. In these particular works I used images from tornado damage in Tulsa and WWII era bombers dropping their payload.

In the spring of 2011, the famous inventor and trans-humanist Ray Kurzweil gave a lecture at the University of Florida. I had already been thinking of the tower Babel, and other stories of failed ambition, and with these in mind, I perceived a contrast

⁴ Ibid. pg. 181

⁵ Benjamin, Walter. [The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media](#). The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge Mass. 2009.

between the utopian vision he presented for the future, and the realities of economic turmoil, failing national infrastructure, and natural disaster.

Kurzweil's presentation functioned as a catalyst and worked to clarify my intentions. The archetypes of failure contained within the biblical and mythological narratives I was using needed to be conceptually linked to an ultimate antitype of failure that could exist in the future. Superimposing the scale-shifted, collapsed block towers onto a desolate landscape or cityscape, as in *Untitled Calamity #9* (PLATE 7) began to speak to the temporal nature of my ideas. Using an atmosphere that suggested smoke, as if rising from some future catastrophe or nuclear winter, I created a dark, obscuring air, which would later become a staple of later paintings and drawings. The absence of figures in *Untitled Calamity #9* further delineated my intention to create a world in which the decaying remnants are made static. Because there is no romantically placed figure to bring a sense of life or activity to the scene, as in many Romantic era paintings, the image feels quiet and frozen in time, as if a stage with no actors left to play upon it. Both of these factors contribute to the evolving vanitas quality to the drawings. After creating several paintings of stacked blocks, it became clear that any further use of them may be too suggestive of nostalgia for childhood, as in *Untitled* (PLATE 8), and the comparative quality of the blocks superimposed in a space was re-examined. My question was how to create a sense of place with forms in flux between destruction and construction; between being and non-being. This led to a move away from the toy blocks, and towards decayed modernist architecture, dilapidated factories, and structures violently destroyed by acts of man or nature.

The ruins allowed me to think across time, to consider the rise and fall of empires, in relation to the current order, with all its aspirations and likely similar fate. As Brian Dillon would write in his essay on ruins,

“Ruins embody a set of temporal and historical paradoxes. The ruined building is a remnant of, and portal into, the past; its decay is a concrete reminder of the passage of time. And yet it survives, [...] At the same time, the ruin casts us forward in time; it predicts a future in which our present will slump into similar disrepair or fall victim to some unforeseeable calamity. The ruin, despite its state of decay, somehow outlives us. And the cultural gaze that we turn on ruins is a way of loosening ourselves from the grip of punctual chronologies, setting ourselves adrift in time. Ruins are part of the long history of the fragment, but the ruin is a fragment with a future; it will live on after us despite the fact that it reminds us too of a lost wholeness or perfection”⁶

It is this ability of ruins to collapse history that interested me as I sought to make connections between the fall of past civilizations, current events, and uncertainties for the future. The image of a ruin can blur the line between past, present, and future. But I also began to question to what end? Is destruction the only thing that lies in the future?

While maintaining a palette of *uncertainty or despair*⁷, I became interested in injecting a level of hope into the work, and sought to make an image that suggested a persistence to move past failure. Light became the vehicle for hope, a symbol of the divine presence, as in the Romantic and some post-impressionist traditions. In *Untitled Calamity #13* (PLATE 9) the lights illuminate the staircase within the darkened mass of twisted debris in a collapsed structure that is suggestive of an office building. Light

⁶ Dillon, Brian. *Ruins*. Whitechapel Gallery. MIT Press. Cambridge, MA. 2011. Pg. 11

⁷ Celant, Germano. *Anselm Kiefer: Salt of the Earth*. Skira Editore S.p.A. Milano, Italy. 2011. pg. 179

became an allegorical subject that represented a determined effort to ignore ego and continue on to pursue hope after failure. *Untitled Calamity #13* also introduced the staircase into my visual vocabulary which became a metaphorical device to represent a transitory state and spiritual ascension. The use of the stairs would later become a trope that I used limitedly, but light would become a more important part of the work.

During the summer of 2012 I attended an artist residency at the Contemporary Artist Center Woodside, in Troy, New York. The area was filled with neglected and partially collapsed factories (PLATE 10). In *Hither* (PLATE 11) I referenced an abandoned, dilapidated brick factory that I had explored. I wanted to convey a sense of hope in failure by using upward leading staircases to contrast with a pile of broken cinder blocks at the bottom of the painting. In *Waning Highway* (PLATE 12), I compounded the use of stairs in the portrayal of a modernist architectural ruin. The composition funnels the eye to a central tower made of debris. This tower represents an attempt to use the still-standing part of a ruin as a suggestion of life after failure. This tower leads the viewer up to a series of stairs, ladders, and catwalks that ultimately lead the eye back into a deep pictorial space that shows a mountainous landscape. It was my intention to compress time in this image, to equate the landscape in the background to a distant past or far off future. Deep, perspectival space allowed the creation of the kind of chronological history that Thomas Cole used through his "*Course of Empire*" series, but in a single painting. By having forms continually recede into the background, movement is suggested through history. This concept of collapsing time on canvas became an important conceptual underpinning to drawings in *The Inauspicious Present*.

Throughout this project, I had a longing for a personal connection with my content. My paintings and drawings, while engaging concepts of history and the failure of modern society, were emotionally disconnected from me. The act of painting, in a sense, reinforced this. The grand narrative of millennia of painting weighed heavily upon me. I felt there was a kind of mediation present in the way I painted, a translation from mind to hand to paint to canvas, that furthered this alienation. Returning to drawing with graphite and charcoal, with its immediate sensibility, became an obvious way to insert myself into the work.

Using graphite sticks and pencils of varying size and hardness, allowed for a fluidity and rhythm of mark that I was unable to achieve in paint. Slow, measured lines contrast with repetitive hatch marks or quick gestures that arc across the entire surface of the drawing. In short, drawing was much more evocative of a haptic sensibility than my paintings had been.

Using anachronistic imagery for subject matter, I composed images that linked my feelings of failure to the broader notions of societal failure. I equated defeat and its accompanying shame and self-loathing to self-destruction and death.

In *The Great Physician*, (PLATE 13), a coneless airplane is in the foreground and the perspective of the drawing directs the eye up a staircase into an immense, triple arched, baroque cathedral portal in the background. In the middle ground are dense layers of wrecked aircraft that merge and disappear into the shadow of the looming structure. Thinking of the story of Icarus, and the ages long desire to fly, flight functions as a metaphor for achievement. In *The Great Physician*, crashed aircraft are used as metaphors for failed aspirations and unsustainable success, and the use of sacred

spaces illustrates my sense of longing for redemption from the guilt of failure. There is a sense of light and air in the space that the forms inhabit, that made the drawing feel open, accessible, and transient.

The Great Physician began on raw canvas because of my own uncertainty of the project. Though initially left with the possibility of transition to painting, the drawing was quickly recognized as being a fully realized artwork. The success of this work solidified my commitment to drawing.

The Summit, (PLATE 14) is a semi-surrealistic combination of diverse images, consisting of tents from a mountain base camp, the exploding Hindenburg, and the Berliner Dom Lutheran cathedral. The scene, situated in the interior of the cathedral depicts the tents on the floor with a campfire replacing the pews. All of this is overshadowed by the large burning zeppelin bursting through the cathedral wall. The zeppelin and the cathedral are both symbols of German nationalism, but the former represents a shameful past, and the latter, rebuilt with donated public and private funds in the decades following the war, represents an enduring spirit. With the temporary structures of the tents I wanted to suggest a kind of external observation, patiently waiting for the next disaster.

While the conceptual tension of the work was successful, the surface became too opaque, too black, and too controlled. The light, which the raw canvas provided in *The Great Physician* was lost and it was with this work that I realized the canvas, and the light it provided, was conceptually significant in the work.

It was at this point that the elements for my thesis show, *The Inauspicious Present* came together. As a representational drawing on canvas, done in traditional

media, the work suggests a preliminary study prior to a painting but provides no room for painting to occur. This provisional state inserts what is depicted into a 'wedge' in the space-time continuum. Raphael Rubenstein asks in his 2009 essay *Provisional Painting*: "And what if provisional painting is an implicit critique of human ambition, a kind of vanitas?"⁸ A drawing on canvas lies within the context of the incomplete and therefore the imperfect. This "complete incompleteness," relates to my interest in history's cyclical nature, and my attempt to collapse history onto canvas. Furthermore, its exposes my own artistic uncertainties, as ambivalently existing between drawing and painting.

The wreckage represented in the drawings appears post-apocalyptic, but not frightening. The drawings are quiet and contemplative. This quietness reinforces the works conceptual relation to vanitas still-life paintings. While decay hints at mortality, the role of light in the work offers an argument for transcendence, life after death, and hope beyond failure.

The Inauspicious Present consists of three large drawings, averaging seven feet tall by six feet wide, on raw canvas. They are hung from a bar on the wall, draping freely on the sides and bottom. (PLATE 15). This hang allows the movement of air to affect the work, suggesting the object itself is in an incomplete or intermediate state of existence; not flat on the wall like a drawing, but not spaced from the wall by a stretcher bar like a painting. The hanging method allows the edges to slightly curl in, and, by being activated by the slight breeze of a passerby, the movement of the surface exists in flux,

⁸ Rubenstein, Ralph. "Provisional Painting" Part 2. [Art In America](http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/provisional-painting-part-2/).
<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/provisional-painting-part-2/>

thus strengthening the provisional read of the work and implicating the viewer's relation to the concept. Erasure shavings and other remnants of the works creation remain at the lip of the bottom edge of each drawing, serving as signifiers for the destructive aspect of creation.

Each piece develops uniquely, but the works selected for *The Inauspicious Present* have common steps to their making. In the planning of a composition, the distribution of light became an important element of the process. After constructing a composition using digital collaging tools on the computer, I very lightly make a general sketch on a canvas that is partially sealed with thin layers of clear gesso. Using painters tape to mask areas that are to serve as the 'light' within the drawing, the surface is then covered in washes of transparent burnt umber, sap green, paynes gray, and zinc or titanium white, removing parts of the mask as I progress from one color to another. This is followed by increasingly dark washes of powdered graphite in solvent. After this the drawing is worked over with a range of pencils and drawn back into with a subtractive use of erasures. Limited brushings of charcoal powder mixed with acrylic matte medium are then used to lay in the darkest areas. I then again go over the drawing with graphite washes and pencils. In covering the canvas with the gray and black drawing material, touch, gesture and mark became very important parts, literally presenting the obfuscation of history and the decay of absolutes that accompanies personal and universal failure.

The Inauspicious Present #1 (PLATE 16) depicts a series of collapsed highway overpasses based on the widely circulated photographs of the 2007 I-35 bridge collapse

in Minnesota. Keeping in mind Benjamin's theses, I decided to use this recent American disaster. Creating a labored drawing based upon a digital collage of photographs from this incident (PLATE 17), I hoped to disrupt the general ambivalence with which we receive these images. Using a recent event, and rendering it in a way that simultaneously feels aged and from the future, I question accepted narratives of history, and challenge utopian aspirations.

The diagonal movement of the collapsed structure creates movement that leads the eye through the piece and back into a pictorial space. This space, composed of cool washes of titanium white and overlaid with vertical lines, expands to fill the whole of the negative space, shrouding the work in the melancholic atmosphere. These vertical lines, resembling rain, but with more weight, create a sense that the structure's failure was like the collapse of a fatigued Atlas. Broad, gestural marks bring energy into the drawing and become a sign of deterioration, like scratches on film.

The Inauspicious Present #2 (PLATE 18), evolved from images of Hurricane Sandy and the houses from Long Island, and other beachfront areas that were ripped off their foundation. The process of image construction allows for the duplication of forms, in this case the house, which is represented at different angles. The foreground has the bare foundation, with a few stacks of bricks standing out of a pool of water. The mid to back ground contains ruins and the houses against a dark sky. Where all the angles intersect is an empty space that opens to an intense light in the background that suggests hope in loss. This light is reflected in the water that has flooded the foundation, giving the work a subtle luminosity.

The last drawing of the series *The Inauspicious Present #3* (PLATE 19) is a compilation of images from different disasters such as Christchurch, New Zealand, (following a large Earthquake) and tornado ravished Tulsa, Oklahoma. The effect of this made the images feel familiar, yet unspecific.

My intention with this drawing was to limit the strong lights and darks and focus on the atmosphere. In the foreground, forms, such as rock and debris are still clear, but the middle ground is obscured by a veil of graphite washes and vertical pencil lines (PLATE 20). Architectural structures almost disappear within the fog of gray, and the uncertain threshold between form and formless is explored. It is in this boundary between being and non-being that anxiety and fear rests. With *The Inauspicious Present #3*, I feel I am finally getting at the sense of uncertainty that I have been striving for throughout my research.

The development of this project has fostered my growth as an artist in ways that were unimaginable before. An increased sensibility to my art practice has distilled my primary visual language of order and disorder, which has unfolded into a meaningful dialogue with a viewer. Through my research, I have honed this language into a concept that can evoke uncertainty, fear, and hope simultaneously. Similarly, I have come to understand drawing as a material investigation, and representation of, meaning. Technique and skill can mature over a lifetime, and concepts will evolve, but this project ingrained in me the understanding that for an idea to reach fruition, it takes time, effort, and a lot of trial and error. I do not consider *The Inauspicious Present* the end of a project, but rather the

beginning. This work will continue to unfold, and the work will only grow stronger as my ideas and skills mature.

Through the struggles encountered with this project, I have gained the experiential knowledge that, though I may be confused when everything seems to be covered in an uneasy grayness, and alarmed by the sight of the first flames of failure, I only need persistence to work through the creative roadblocks and discover a more genuine art on the other side. Failure is short lived, all will not fall into ruin. Incertitude will make me grow into a more patient and benevolent person.

PLATES



PLATE 1. Giovanni Panini. *Capriccio of Classical Ruins*. 1739



PLATE 2: Hubert Robert. *Démolition de l'église Saint-Jean-en-Grève*. 1800



PLATE 3: Thomas Cole. *Course of Empire, Destruction*. 1836



PLATE 4: Caspar David Friedrich. *Abbey in the Oakwood*. Oil on Canvas. 44" X 67"
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PLATE 5: Donald Keefe. *Untitled Calaity #5*. Acrylic on Paper. 30" X 83" 2011.



PLATE 6: Donald Keefe. *Untitled Calamity #4*. Acrylic on Canvas. 40" X 63. 2011

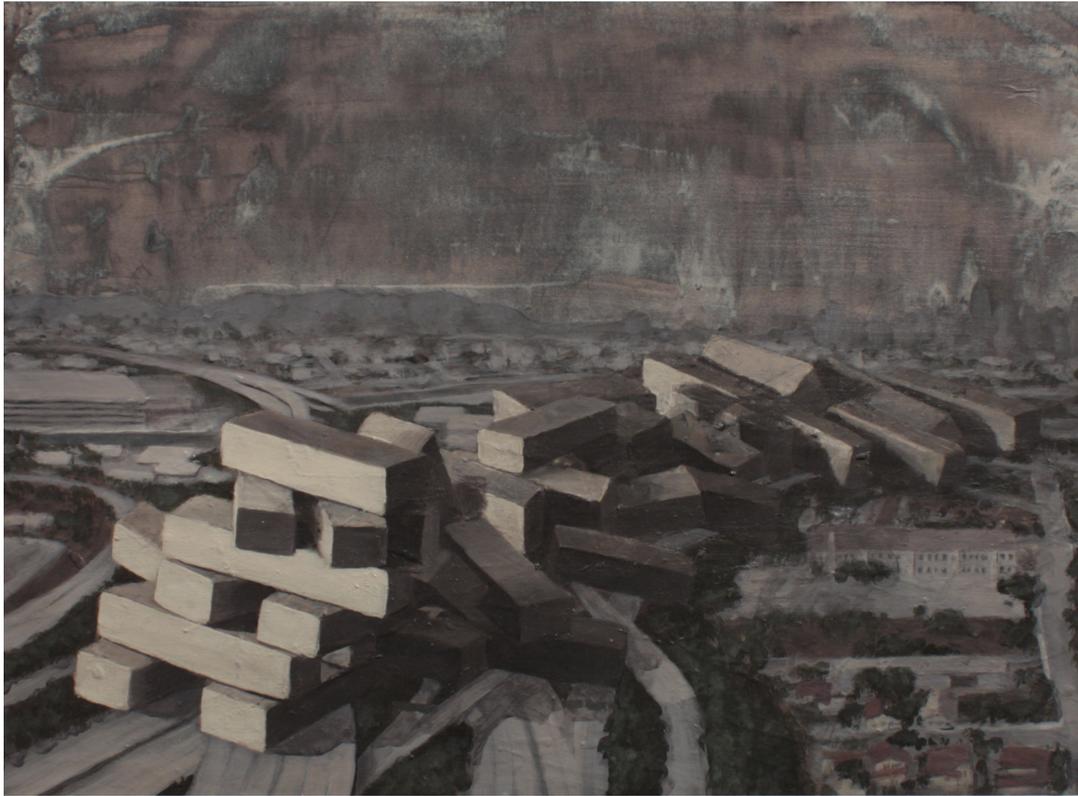


PLATE 7: Donald Keefe. *Untitled Calamity #9*. Acrylic on Paper. 24" X 30" 2011.



PLATE 8: Donald Keefe. *Untitled*. Acrylic on Panel. 32" X 52." 2011.



PLATE 9: Donald Keefe. *Untitled Calamity #13*. Acrylic on Panel. 60"X 80" 2012.





PLATE 10: Bottom of pg.27, and two photographs on pg. 28. Ruins from Upstate New York.





PLATE 11: Donald Keefe. *Hither*. Acrylic on Paper. 47" X 41" 2012.



PLATE 12: Donald Keefe. *Waning Highway*. Acrylic on Canvas. 44"X 62" 2012.



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PLATE 15: *The Inauspicious Present*, MFA Exhibition, Installation.



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<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/provisional-painting-part-2/>

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Donald Keefe was born in Iowa in 1984 and grew up in southern California. He has traveled extensively and lived in many different locations around the country. In 2005, he was baptized into the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and settled in Kentucky to attend the University of Kentucky.

After receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in painting and drawing, he was accepted to the University of Florida for a Masters Degree. Donald received his MFA in 2013.

Donald is an avid student of history and theology. He is also an active member of the community, using his musical talents to minister to the residents of nursing and assisted living homes.