JOSHUA NIERODZINSKI

HOW IT STARTED, HOW IT'S GOING

PREFACE

The aim of this publication and exhibition is to document the development of my artistic practice from 2010-2023. I felt that the title, *How it started, how it's going,* was appropriate for a retrospective exhibition and hints at how I think about creating meaning through serial imagery. The phrase is a reference to the Internet meme where, as the NY Times explains, "the basic concept is to show the passage of time through oppositional bookends. The more surprising the second photo, the better. And it doesn't necessarily need to make sense ... but the best versions of this meme are about remembering journeys — and implying how much work or time it took to get from point A to point B."

And so we begin this journey with the essay, *When Servers Burn: The Next Great Fire At Alexandri*a by Sam O' Hana who reflects on contemporary questions concerning data storage and cultural heritage. Sam is a performance and research-led practitioner in critical and lyrical writing. He is currently a doctoral student at the Graduate Center of The City University of New York. I am honored that he would include my work in his research and grant permission for it to be published here. The second section is a Chronology of events and artworks that have informed my current body of work. The book concludes with the essay, *Forensic Imagination and the Anatomy of Painting*, where I discuss the theoretical and technical foundation of my practice.

I am immensely grateful to everyone who has supported my work. Far too many to list individually here but know that my appreciation is sincere. Special thanks to my parents, Ora Finn and Joseph Nierodzinski, my brother, Malcolm Nierodzinski, and my aunt, Jane Kuhar. My partner and champion, Nataša Prljević. My early artistic mentors, Anne Leone and Daniel Ludwig; The Williamstown Art Conservation Center, and in particular Matt Hamilton, for helping with conservation imaging; and last but not least, Gocha Tsinadze and CONTEXT for hosting this exhibition.

When Servers Burn: The Next Great Fire At Alexandria

Sam O'Hana

"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

– Milan Kundera

I was recently talking with a medieval scholar Chris Buonanno, who remarked that the vellum manuscripts of the middle ages which have survived did so partly because of the quality of the materials that the monks used for copying. Good quality parchment– that is to say, stretched, scraped and dried animal skins– could last for hundreds or even thousands of years. There is of course more than one way to lose a text. We can't know for sure how many manuscripts did not survive the many lootings, burnings and general wear and tear that makes up the more than five thousand years of history of printing practices that started with reed papyrus of the Ancient Egyptians. Being a book before the industrial revolution was a tough job: many modern printings of poems in Old English are slashed with ellipses merely because of damage to pages where not enough intact copies of the work survive into our own era.

Should this be a pressing concern in the contemporary era? Today our priceless information is safeguarded inside aluminium cases, between transistors, silicon and inside copper wiring. Make a PDF of the Domesday Book and toss the original into the recycling. Keep all this in mind, of course, when a solar flare knocks out the undersea cables that allow data transfer across the Atlantic between Europe and the US , scrambling satellites and frying electrical grids. The last time this happened, in 1859, the resulting radiation burst caused telegraph wires to spontaneously burst into flames. Better yet, keep a cup of water by your desk in case a fire breaks out at your local data center, where an out-of-control blaze might, if you're in the US, delay 11,00 flights and cause $350 million worth of deliberate damage, or if you're

in France, knock out 3.2 million websites in a matter of hours, including multiple government agency sites.

Art thou afeard? Don't start stuffing punch cards into a shoe box just yet. These crises are rare: the next major solar flare is not expected for at least another 90 years, and it's not often server centers are supervised by employees with easy access to gasoline who need some paid time off rather than another day of work in the famously demanding world of air traffic control systems. Servers are almost always backed up, and IT infrastructure is certainly more resilient than the days of magnet-fearing reel-to-reel data storage. What is more common of course, systemic even, is that in the age of information overload, simply keeping a searchable record of everything we might ever need to know is becoming a far greater challenge than finding space to store it.

We are approaching the ten year anniversary of the pronouncement that 90% of the world's data was created in the two years preceding it. Despite this, or in fact probably because of it, we are losing data all the time. We are awash with bits. Those of us who work in digital worlds– which is to say 17% of humanity, and a lumbering 60% of the American workforce, are under siege from the threat of losing track of what we need while diggin our way out of a snowstorm of irrelevant data. More than half of us are now struggling to find the information we need within a two hour window, meanwhile we're sending each other 332 billion emails a day.

Many of us are extorted into paying for– or are priced out of access to– proprietary information management and coordination systems such as the Slacks, Statas and Squarespaces of the world. The alternatives are hardly inspiring for the average bear: sell your personal data for temporary access to cheap and cheerful software owned by a murky and mysterious parent company, or scrabble your way up a precipitous learning curve in the hopes of assembling your own solution that won't need regular maintenance, troubleshooting and manual upgrades in perpetuity. Anyone who has tried to manage a team via email only,

wrangle statistics with open source code, or build their own website from scratch knows the risks involved in going it alone with your precious data.

So what does a quality preservation material look like? Joshua Nierodzinski is an artist whose work involves applying layers of pigment that react to light at various wavelengths, making a layered painting revealed by different light sources. His paintings can be X-rayed to reveal a new image, and are sold with an NFC tag that links to the NFT of the artwork itself– the digital record verifies the material and vice versa. A painting by Josh is a "poetic hard drive for human experience", and he told me that even digital images can decay over time in a process known as "bit rot", where the electromagnetic charge in a digitally-stored image eventually disperses: a single flip of one binary bit from 0 to 1 in a file of 326,000 bits can irretrievably corrupt 50% of the image. One of the best ways to preserve an image in fact is an archival pigment print on acid free paper – a process that would keep the image intact for 200 years if kept in an album. This is a lot longer than the range of a couple of decades which hard drives tend to offer, and orders of magnitude longer than the handful of years that a solid state drive can promise when left unplugged.

Of course material records are constantly under threat too– the prospect of losing priceless cultural material is a reality for curators, librarians and archivists in places like Iraq, where ISIS have destroyed 3,200 year old Assyrian city walls, in Mali where 14th century parchment manuscripts are literally under fire, and in Ukraine where ad-hoc preservationists are wrapping church statues in flame-retardant blankets.

This work is no longer the domain of specialists. People spend thousands of dollars (sometimes indirectly) on essential life skills such as reading, writing and numeracy in early years, familiarising ourselves with foreign languages or learning to drive in later years, and then investing heavily in our housing after that, whether in high rents for better-connected neighbourhoods and cities, or in capital-intensive renovations of existing homes. For some reason we don't think about how well-housed our data are, or whether we have the necessary skills to manage all of it in a sustainable way.

Unlike our friendships, for example, we tend to think of building and maintaining our own IT infrastructure as a task that belongs to some anonymous technician– surely this someone else's job! we think, as we paw our way through a slurry of corrupt and oddly-formatted documentation with uncertain origins and authorship. Sure could be! And to be sure, they'll set the price. A sanitation worker in New York City with five and a half years of experience earns more than a tenured professor. Furthermore, these specialists cannot make every decision for us– do we keep every single photo of our adorable pets, or just the best ones? What counts as "best"? Merely saving everything is no longer going to work and we have to face the question of how to carefully preserve our artefacts as we methodically cast aside the junk.

The solution, to borrow a phrase, is simple but not easy. Learn the ropes, understand the risks, practice mindful deletion and get organized. Whether bringing an ancient birch bark manuscript or Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass to new audiences, by learning your own preservation techniques, you too can prevent forest fires– or start them yourself so that new saplings can grow in the clearing. Above all, be a storage omnivore with an understanding of context, ruthless enough to know when to scrap some data, experienced enough to know that fires are part of the process. We otherwise risk our data being destroyed by someone else's "accident", or simply lost through our own failure to stay organised in a world of routine atomic blasts of information. The line popularized by senator Elizabeth Warren in 2014 hits for activists and archivists alike: "If you don't have a seat at the table, you're probably on the menu."

NOTES

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Inventory #

Chronology

1982
September: I was born in the United States in Worcester, Massachusetts, United States of America, to Ora Finn (b.1954) and Joseph Nierodzinski (b.1956).

December: The Internet Protocol Suite (TCP/IP) was standardized, which permitted worldwide proliferation of interconnected networks, the birth of the Internet. All networks could now be connected by a universal language.

1983
July: The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) is first released in Japan.

1990
February: Adobe officially releases Photoshop.

August: Gulf War / US Invasion of Iraq aka the Video Game War.

1991
February: AOL for DOS was launched.
March: Rodney King is beaten by Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers.

1995
April: Oklahoma City Bombing

1998
May: My parents get an amicable divorce. My brother, Malcolm Nierodzinski, and I live with our mother in the same town and stay close to our father. I am introduced to photography in high school.

1999:
April: Columbine High School Massacre
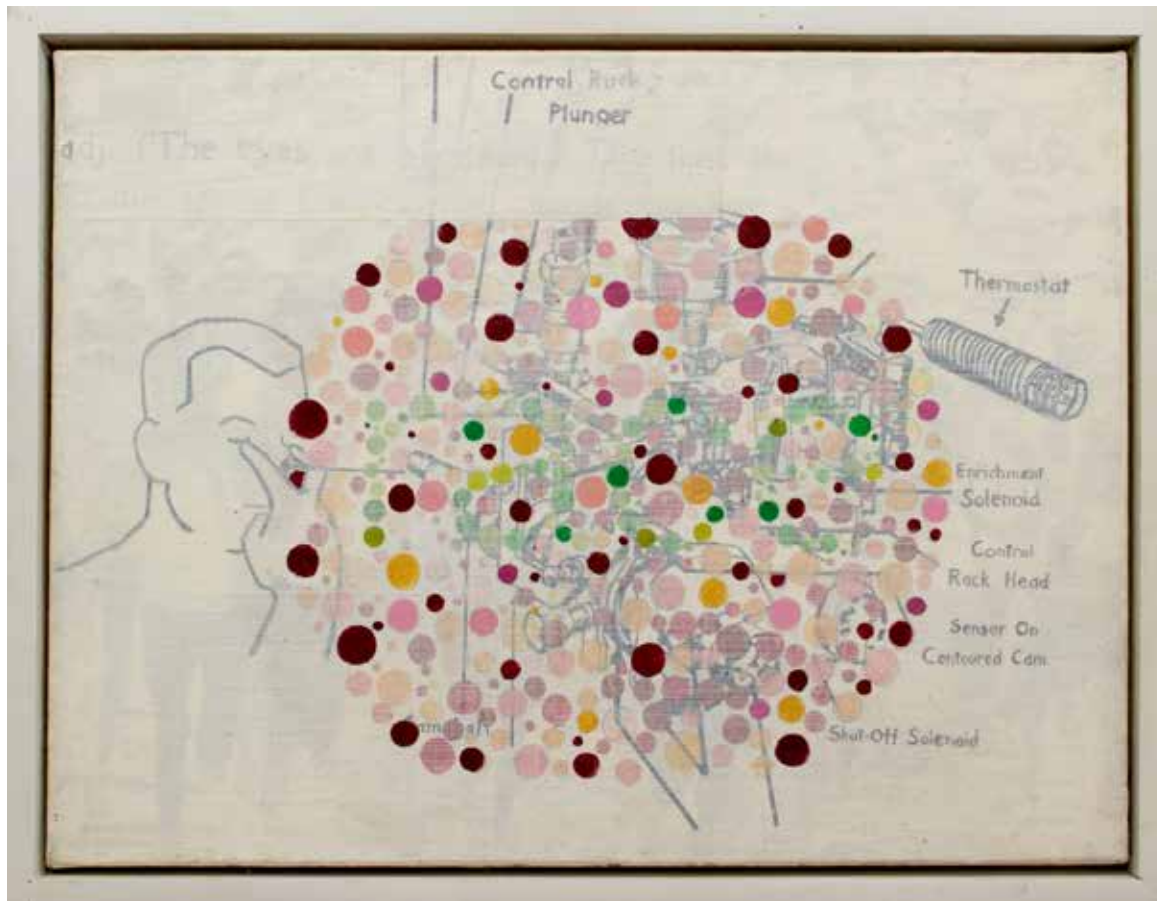
2000
August: Accepted to University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth for BFA.

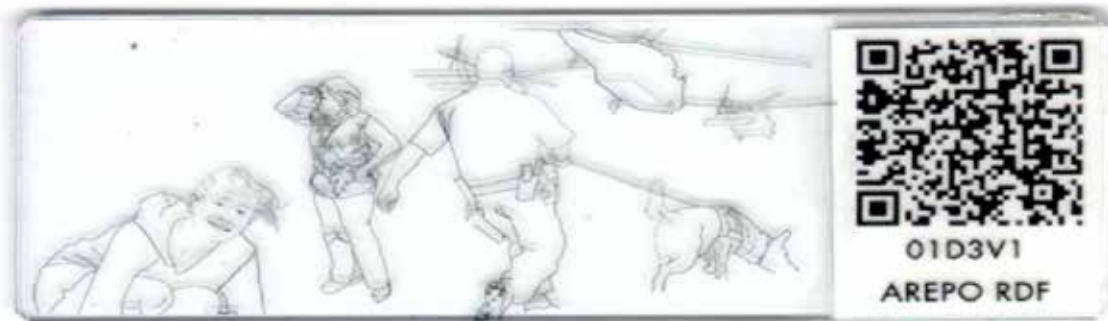**November**: George W. Bush is elected the 43rd white male President of the United States.

1. Pool Party 2010
Oil on canvas
20 x 20 in. (50.8 x 50.8 cm)

2. Race. 2010
Acrylic on canvas
12 x 16 in. (30.48 x 40.64 cm)

3. Trace Amounts. 2012
Digital print and archival ink on microscopic slide
1 x 5 x 3 in. (2.54 x 12.7 x 7.62 cm)

2001
September: 9/11 happens as I am in my first painting class.

2005
May: I complete BFA in Painting.

2006
September: Facebook opened to everyone at least 13 years old with a valid email address.

2007:
January: Apple releases the iPhone 1.

May: I begin to work as a commercial fisherman until June 2011.

December: Great Recession begins.

2008:
October: The word "bitcoin" was defined in a white paper. [Birth of Bitcoin.]

November: Barack Obama is elected as the 44th and 1st black male President of the United States.

2010-11
Summer: Pool Party (Fig1.), Race (Fig.2), Trace Amounts (Fig.3).

2012
June: Accepted to the University of Michigan Ann Arbor for MFA. I meet Nataša Prljević.

2014
Fall: Photo emulsion paintings (Figs. 4, 5, 6, & 7) and How it started, how it's going (Fig 14.)

2015
August: Move to NYC.

2016
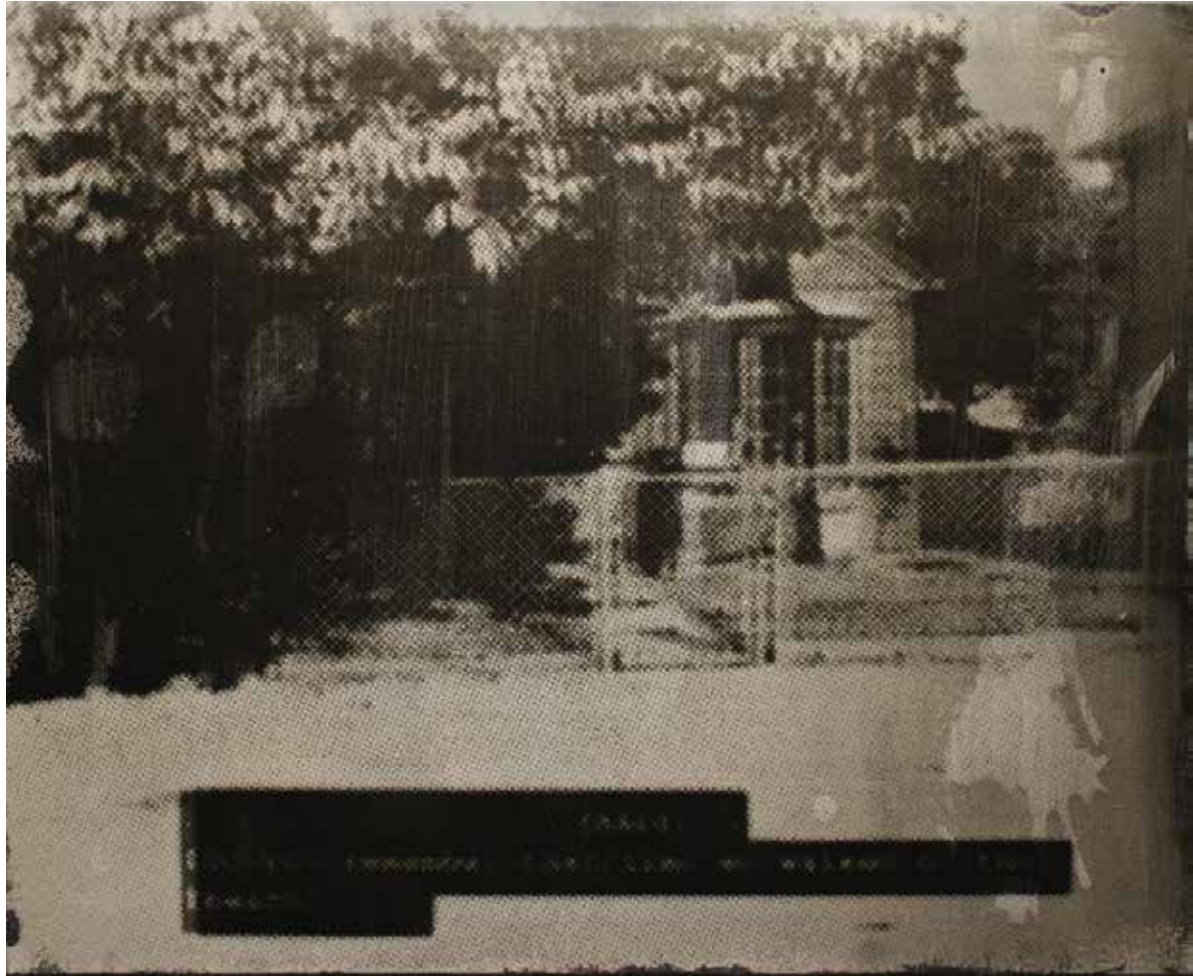**April:** Joshua and Nataša are married.

November: Donald Trump is elected the 45th and 44th white male President of the United States.

2017-2019: Paintings (Fig. 8-13)

2020
March: COVID-19 Global Pandemic declared in U.S.

2021-2022 Paintings (Fig.15–19)

4. Street Coroner. 2014
Photographic emulsion on canvas
24 x 30 in. (30.48 x 40.64 cm)

5. The Sex of Fire (Enter). 2014
Photographic emulsion and oil on canvas
16 x 20 in. (40.64 x 50.8 cm)

6. The Sex of Fire (Exit). 2014
Photographic emulsion and oil on canvas
16 x 20 in. (40.64 x 50.8 cm)

7. The Moments. 2014
Photographic emulsion on canvas
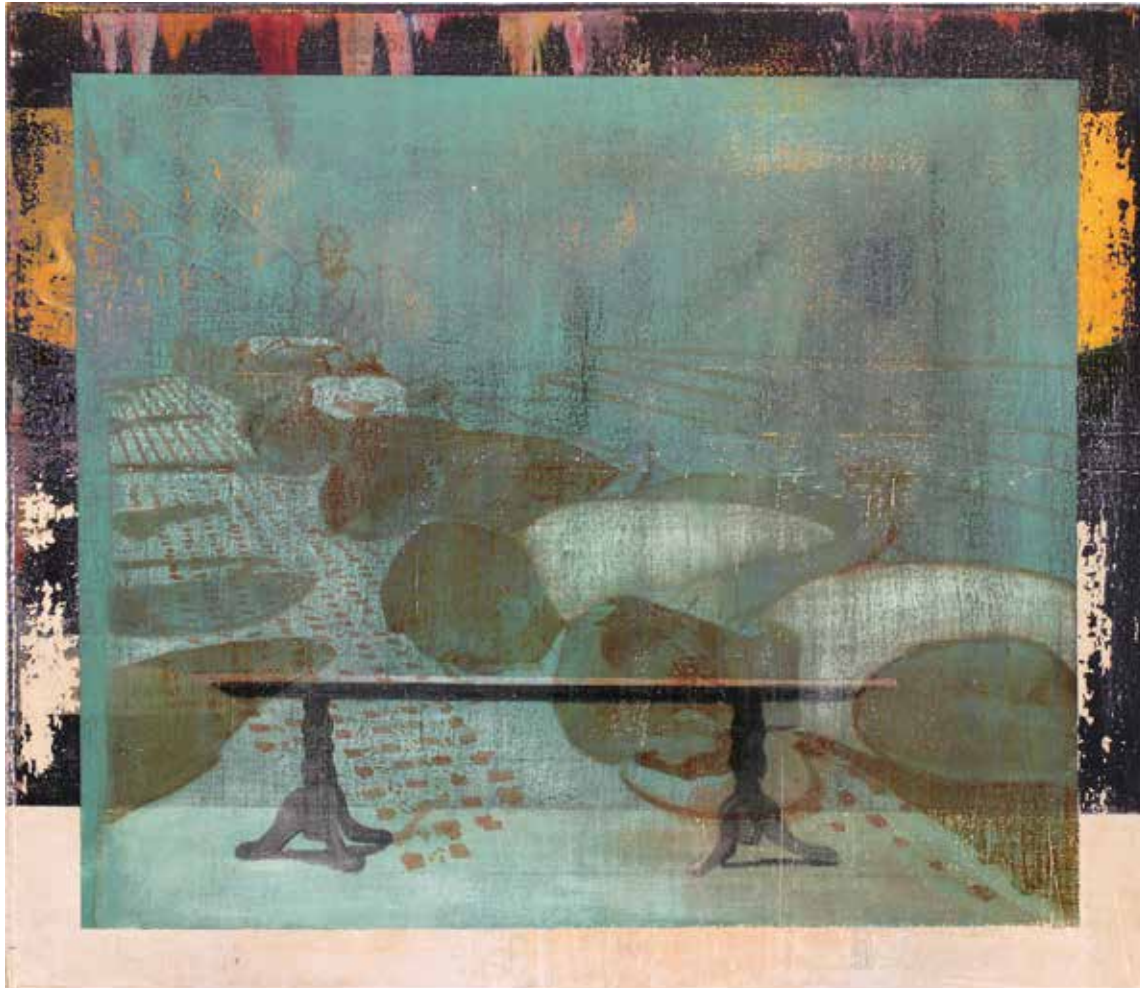Each canvas 30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm)

8. Fair View. 2017-2023
Oil on canvas
54 x 40 in. (137.16 x 101.60 cm)

9. Purgatory. 2017-2023
Oil on canvas
54 x 40 in. (137.16 x 101.60 cm)

10. Piesis. 2018
Oil on canvas
32 x 36 in. (81.28 x 91.44 cm)

11. La Cena. 2018
Oil on canvas
32 x 36 in. (81.28 x 91.44 cm)

12. Board Meeting. 2019
Oil on canvas
10 x 12 in. (25.4 x 30.48 cm)

13. The Youth. 2019
Oil on canvas
10 x 12 in. (25.4 x 30.48 cm)

Material

Process

Forensic Imagination and The Anatomy of Painting
Joshua Nierodzinski

"We live in a time of forensic imagination, as evidenced by the current vogue for forensic science in television drama and genre fiction. Forensics in this popular sense returns us to the scene of the crime…at the juncture of instrumentation, inscription, and identification. But forensics is commemorative as well as juridical, and fundamental to the arts as well as to the sciences."

- Michael Kirschenbaum

The word "forensic" is popularly associated with the scientific method of collecting and presenting information about a crime to be used in a court of law. The word conjures a mixture of logical methodology and macabre fascination. However, the word has a more expansive definition. In the introduction to the book, Forensis: Architecture of Public Truth, Eyal Weizman discusses the word's origin associated with the Roman forum, the center of commerce, politics, law, and art. Weizman is a leading contributor to the Forensic Architecture project at Goldsmiths, University of London along with an interdisciplinary group that includes artists, scientists, and lawyers. Their mission is to "expand the scope of contemporary forensics and challenge its popular role in articulating notions of public truth". Their work emerges from the 20th century development of science and technological interpretation of objects and how they affect the way we see. Photography has played a major role in the development of scientific vision and lends credibility to events.

Truth has come to look a certain way and so forensic aesthetics are defined as "…the mode of appearance of things in forums- the gestures, techniques, and technologies of demonstration, methods of theatricality, narrative and dramatization; image enhancements and technologies or projection; the creation and demolition of reputation, credibility, and competence.

The term, Forensic Aesthetic, has been applied to the work of filmmaker Michael Haneke as well as artists, Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan, in their 1997 exhibition and book, Evidence. Many of these images still rely on the macabre suspense and residue left after a crime or the tension just before one. Artists have begun to directly implement forensic techniques and associate themselves within its philosophy and methodology. Serbian-born contemporary artist and educator, Milica Tomič, is one example. In her 2011 lecture titled, Art and Right to Public Space, presented at the Stanford Humanities Center discussed her use of forensics in art:

"I use forensics as a method, of presenting the facts of evidence, the practice of making an argument by using objects before a gathering such as a professional, political, legal forum. So, forensic does both: An analytical form of history writing and a projective practice of forum building."

While Tomić focuses her work on the reconstruction and reenactment of real events, the forensic aesthetic is not restricted to real or objective crime scenes, facts, and evidence. As Greg Battye notes, the forensic gaze is "always concerned with recording, retaining, investigating and clarifying what has been, and how, and why. Even [images] predicated on imaginary or fictional constructions are, ultimately, as much about the world as it is, as they are about how the world might be." This is the operative concept of the "forensic imagination". Media artist and senior research fellow at Goldsmiths (UK), Susan Schuppli, defines the concept of forensic imagination as "predicated upon enlarging the field of enunciation through the creative retrieval and mobilization of affects. Rather than a search for empirical truths, its objectives are oriented towards an expansion of the object's or artifact's expressive potential."

Forensics, real and imaginary, can make the invisible visible and the past present. It can reveal the history of a person, object, or event and point toward a possible future. Media objects are designed to record evidence of events to which it can bear witness and painting is particularly well-suited. As Gilles Deleuze has noted, "[Is this not a] primary question in painting? How to make invisible forces, visible? Painters make plain the hidden and unspeakable aspects of living. In cases of forensic imagination, a painting is a material witness. Its history inseparable from the layers of paint. While some of this information can be seen from the surface much of it remains locked in covered layers of pigments and mediums. However, art conservators can use forensic imaging techniques, like x-rays, ultraviolet (UV), and infrared to look back through the layers of the painting to reveal their history, the materials used, and the sequence of application.

In 2014, I was intrigued by the possibility of creating distinct image layers on a single canvas. By coordinating photosensitive materials with multispectral of photography I was able to get some promising results in the painting, How it started, how it's going. (Fig.15) It was not until many years later that I was able to coordinate four distinct layers in We Shall Live Again! (1862) (Fig.15). and develop in the most recent paintings (Figs. 16-19).

I am encouraged by other artists who have incorporated these techniques and materials with different intentions and results. In 1998, Kathleen Gilje who worked as a conservator painted Susanna and the Elders Restored. She implements the ability of lead to reflect x-rays, revealing a feminist rebuttal under a copy of Susanna and the Elders, originally by Artemisia Gentileschi in 1610. Beginning in 2004, contemporary Chinese painter, Yang Qian, has been exploring the potential of ultraviolet light and "florescent material to conceal images behind the forefront ones, creating an overlapping relationship among different images. The painter Chelsea Lehman has also worked with X-ray imaging included in her exhibition, Archive, at MOP Projects.

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14. How it started, how it's going. 2014
Oil on canvas (Ultraviolet, Visible, Infrared, X-Ray Photographs)
12 x 16 in. (30.48 x 40.64 cm)
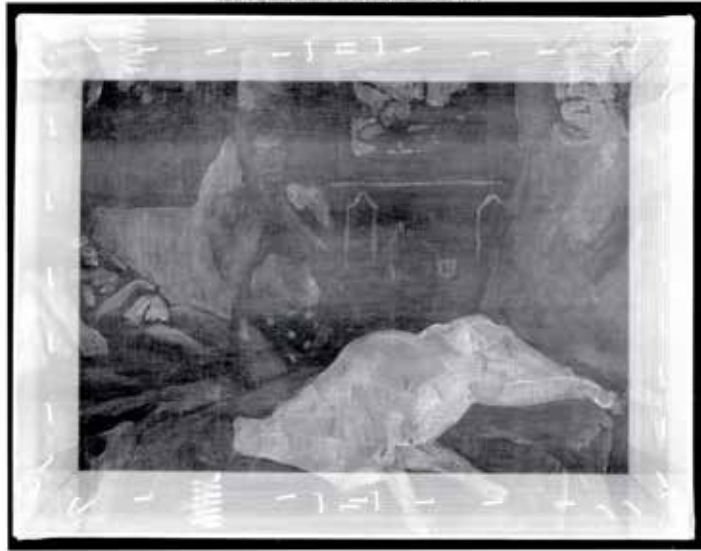
ANATOMY OF PAINTING

MATERIALS

MULTISPECTRAL PROCESS / WAVELENGTH

LEAD WHITE

RADIOGRAPH (X-Ray)
0.01 nm up to 10 nm

CHARCOAL

INFRARED
780 nm - 1 mm

ALL PIGMENTS

VISIBLE
400-780 NM

PHOSPHORESCENT POWDER

ULTRAVIOLET (UV)
365-400 NM

LAYERS OF PAINTING

Pictorial Films

Ground layer

Support
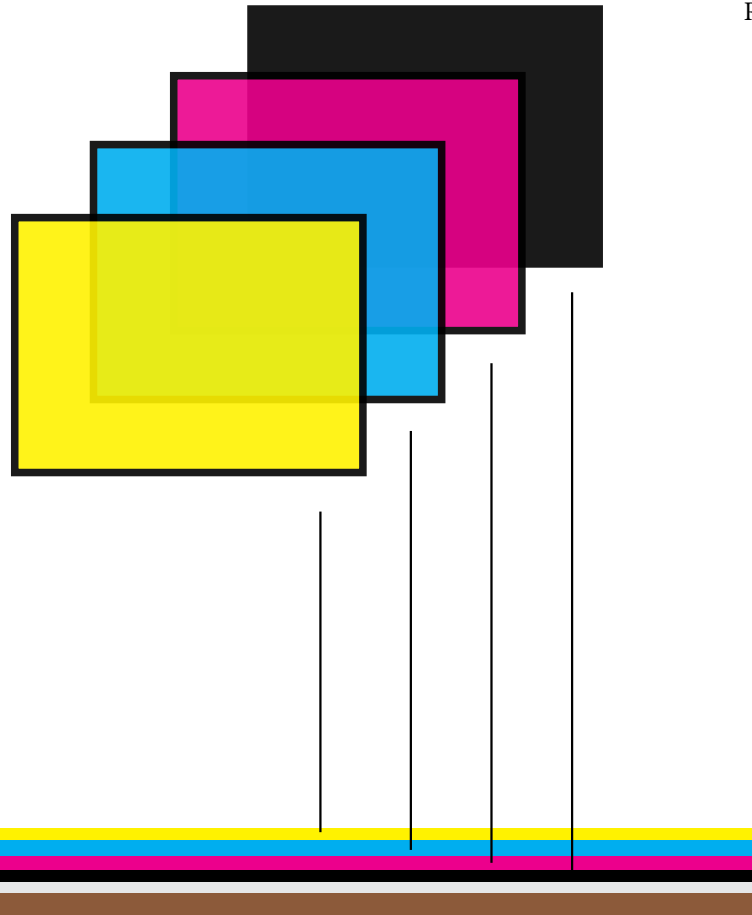
15. We Shall Live Again! (1862). 2020-22
Oil on canvas (Ultraviolet, Visible, Infrared, X-Ray Photographs)
10 x 12 in. (25.4 x 30.48 cm)

16. The Future is _____. 2020-22
Oil on linen (Ultraviolet, Visible, Infrared, X-Ray Photographs)
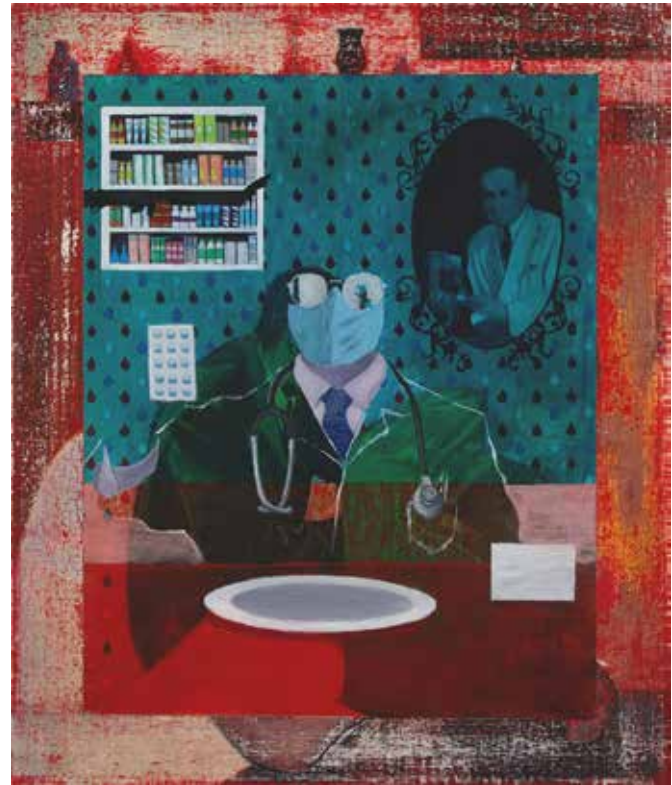20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 60.96 cm)

17. The Future of Warfare is Robotic. 2020-22
Oil on linen (Ultraviolet, Visible, Infrared, X-Ray Photographs)
20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 60.96 cm)

18. His story repeats, her story stays the same. 2020-22
Oil on linen (Ultraviolet, Visible, Infrared, X-Ray Photographs)
20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 60.96 cm)

19. Counter Protest. 2020-22
Oil on canvas (Ultraviolet, Visible, Infrared, X-Ray Photographs)
20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 60.96 cm)

Joshua Nierodzinski (b.1982) is an artist who uses a signature combination of painting and photography to address personal and national histories. He has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Grant and an artist-in-residence at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, The Sam and Adele Golden Foundation, and the Wassaic Artist Residency. He is a recent AIM Bronx Museum Fellow and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

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