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Drew

Liverman

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August 11–September 10

2022

***Drew
Liverman***

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***Mice Elf,  
Again***

Northern – Southern

5th St. b/w Brazos & San Jacinto

Austin

[northern-southern.com](http://northern-southern.com)

# Q&A



Civil Noise/Race to the Farmer's Market, 2022  
acrylic, colored pencil, and oil pastel on canvas, 78x40 inches

the first in a set of five connecting paintings

**Phillip Niemeyer:** These paintings are different than your previous work. A year ago you painted thicker, textured oils, small canvases, and hewed closer to the observable world.<sup>1</sup> The Mice Elf, Again work is thinly painted, acrylics soaking into the unprimed canvas. The subject matter... is harder to pin down.

**What led you to paint like this now?**

Drew Liverman: In terms of the paint and application these are definitely a departure. I think I wanted to work closer to the speed of my marker drawings and also get the translucency I'm able to get with marker/watercolor.

The subject matter is pulled primarily from drawings from 6-7 years ago. I've been going back through a lot of older work recently and the drawings that inspired these new pieces really resonated with thoughts/feelings of late. The colors were more vibrant, less naturalistic. More chaotic and anxious. Reconnecting these old references and inspirations was a strange return which seemed to have potential. In addition to all that there's always this self-imposed pressure to do something distinctly different from the last thing I did. The last few years have been insane and I needed to make work that acknowledged this existential schism or whatever.

**PN: Why the raw canvas? Why do you want to work in such an irreversible way?**

DL: I've always liked working on raw canvas because I like the warmth and texture. Some of it is the immediacy and lack of prep work, so there's a laziness component for sure, but also I've always been into this direct way of working where there's no way to wipe out the image or erase mistakes. It keeps me pretty focused while painting, but there's also a radical acceptance or something where you just have to commit to every mark be they accidental or intentional. You can see the whole process clearly this way. I think the thin/translucent paint kinda amplifies that clarity of process as well. The soaking in nature of the thinner acrylics also gives it more of a textile feel. I've done some work using a batik dye process in the past<sup>2</sup> and this has a similar feeling that I like.



**PN: These paintings feel heavily thought, quickly done, is that right? Do they come from drawing?**

D.L. The paintings are meticulously translated from very quick drawings. I should say the drawing for the paintings is pretty careful in the translation, but then the application of paint is pretty quick. A lot of these come from daily drawings I would do, so while they're not exactly laboriously conceived, they're all part of a larger body of work that's been going on for years, and in that process a lot of recurring images and motifs emerge. So maybe that accumulated labor that comes off as heavily thought out, but then I suppose anyone who's been working as an artist a long time could say the same thing.

**PN: The images feel everyday, but simultaneously art historical (Goya), pop culture (Olaf) and dreamlike. Am I tripping? Elaborate?**

DL: No you're totally right, I think the daily/diary-like drawing practice takes in any imagery/content that interests me and it all comes out one way or another over time. I feel like in art school (and/or late 90s early 2000s art world)<sup>3</sup> there was a lot of talk about this dichotomy of high and low culture and there was a lot of interest in artists deliberately blurring those boundaries. At this point I feel there's no difference whatsoever and I don't consciously differentiate between the everyday/banal/pop and the more academic/arcane/art-historical really. All that matters is that the references work together to make a true feeling and/or interesting starting point for a painting.

**PN: How did it feel to paint these works? How was the time spent with them?**

DL: I really enjoy the speed of painting with the acrylics and it felt great working at a larger scale than I had in quite a while. I really wanted something bigger for this show, something more installation like almost after having been making smaller pieces for years. Working on the "mural"/sequence/cycle piece/s in the space was extremely fulfilling.

Content-wise everything felt and still feels a little strange having done so much work based on the exterior world recently. These were definitely a turn inward/backward and I feel a little more exposed than I typically do.



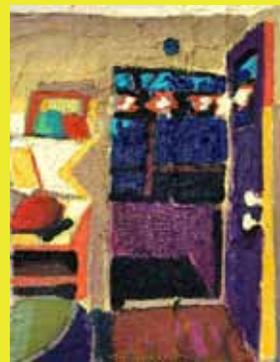
Mice Elf Again, 2022  
acrylic, colored pencil, and oil pastel on canvas, 30x45 inches

## PN: What is the Mice Elf?

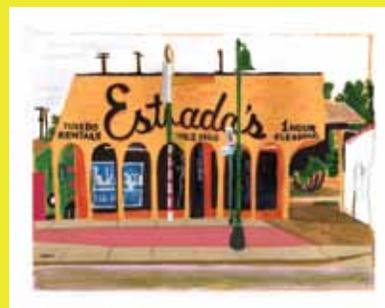
DL: Beyond the Sly and the Family Stone reference,<sup>4</sup> it was one of those things that just really fell into place after the fact. I'd been making self portraits using a kind of technique from ACT therapy, something I learned about while dabbling in meditation techniques/metal health stuff over the past few years. One method they suggest for coping with negative thoughts is to repeat the thoughts back in maybe a cartoon voice, like Roger Rabbit or something. I guess the idea is to disarm the intensity not necessarily through mimicry, but hearing it in a different voice (even when you're still saying it) gives you some distance to see the artificiality/constructed nature of the thought. These self portraits are kind of these cartoons of myself in whatever situation I'm bumming out on and the effect is occasionally pretty gratifying. While thinking on titles for the show that Sly song came on the radio and remembering the way they spell it out, it kinda stuck in my head. You (Phillip) and I met at my studio and were throwing around show names. I mentioned the "Mice Elf" idea and you thought the 'self portrait' of me on my bike was Mice Elf and it all fell into place from there. Just seemed pretty perfect. Once the character had a name I intentionally inserted it into some of the larger panel pieces to create a loose narrative through line. So now it's my trans-dimensional/machine elf/homunculus/pseudo-art-therapeutic self or something. The initial impulse of the character was to break down negative mental narratives and this transformation into a protagonist in this positive-ish narrative of/in the show felt right.

## notes

1.



Drew Liverman, Front door/front porch, 2020  
oil and burlap on canvas, 11x14 inches  
from LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION, N-S-43, 2021



Drew Liverman, Estradas, 2020  
ink, crayon, gouache, collaged paper on paper, 9x12 inches  
from Drew Liverman: PREMEMBER, N-S-38, 2020

2. Expedition Batikback, curated by Steef Crombach  
August 5–26, 2017, Co-Lab Demo Gallery, 721 Congress Ave,  
Austin, 78701

3. VCU

4. "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)", Sly and the  
Family Stone, 1969



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