

Michael “The Khoi” Tran Artist Statement

My recent mixed media paintings investigate different forms of isolation and barriers, manifested in imaginary, introspective and surrealistic spaces. I begin by photographing playground equipment taken from multiple angles. I'm fascinated with the curvature of these forms because the shapes and the colors are enticing and innocent, particularly slides. Slides have a familiarity to them partnered with a bittersweet distant feeling now that I'm older. I then take photos of myself interacting with the pieces to get a feel of the cold, tarnished metals, and matte plastics. Upon reviewing the photos, I form a composition that entangles and snares. I use acrylic and markers because they keep up with the pace in which I make decisions in my mind. The markers lend the ability to add movement, abstraction, flatness, and tactility that I feel is lost in painting. There's a calmness and a relation to the making of repetitive marks with a marker and the patterns and lines that repeat in my work. They echo to each other.

I prioritize the emotion and the narrative before looking into activating the space. It's important for me to think about which strong emotion I want to evoke beforehand. The space is made to be like a maze separating the figure and the viewer. The act of putting up walls is usually perceived as defensive and isolating. I want to show these barriers with a more comforting connotation for they provide protection. Either way, barriers only stall the inevitable. In my narratives, I am a cowboy character who embodies comfort and reassurance even though he is enveloped or contained by large plastic structures and cold abraded metals. My identity as an Asexual influences the patterning and emotions in my work. It's an experience that has a lot of pain and misunderstanding in a hyper-sexualized world and community. I view the cowboy as someone who can do whatever he wants. He becomes the starring role in his own world.

There are times when a person is most vulnerable when they are open, but my work focuses on vulnerability when I am selfishly protecting and isolating my most innocent self as I seek solace in the playground of my mind. I hope my work helps to communicate the safety of putting up a barrier as an act of love and a weapon against being misunderstood.