

Stevan Dupus Artist Statement

I create paintings that depict the social interactions within San Diego's LGBTQ+ bar communities. Having worked extensively as a bar manager and bartender for over 15 years, I have witnessed the shrinking role of the LGBTQ+ bar as a safe space. I have been exploring contradicting emotional responses as well as the influence of queer coding on the LGBTQ+ community. Common themes explore joyful human interactions refuting the underlying theater of loneliness and depression. Single loners pair themselves amongst groups of people while other paintings challenge public verses private through moments of passion. Viewers are then both brought into and pushed out of these rapturous spaces.

Seeking to create a homo-normative narrative, my process begins through lived experience within LGBT+ night life. While participating within these safe spaces I designate areas that meet my compositional requirements to photograph. Upon review, the source images are then collaged together either physically through printed image or digitally in Photoshop. Using these photographic images, I crop my compositions in such a way as to bring the viewer into the narrative while echoing social media's presence within these spaces. My pallet mimics the bars dark and alluring atmosphere while unusual highlights and heavily saturated color reflect neon lights and filters found in night clubs. Paint variation between thin paint and impasto cold wax medium symbolize time, movement, distance and intoxication. In some work, glitter is introduced to fracture or destabilize the moment or to encapsulate the viewer while it floats above the surface of the painting. Flags within the abstracted silhouettes are used to push the plebeian quality of the figures while constraining them within their respective LGBT+ category and can become direct references to sexual language within LGBT+ history.

The work focuses on non-assimilationist politics. It investigates the duality of how the LGBT+ community strives to maintain its diversity and queerness while at the same time become culturally assimilated. My work portrays the community as a homo-normative entity that is a mirror reflection to heteronormative society. Touching on feminism's concept of the male gaze, I expose the viewer to a voyeuristic window of the LGBT+ nightlife for the purpose of scopophilia. Confronting the viewer with the political, it challenges the viewer to question their own role within or outside of LGBT+ society.

Influential artist to my work run from such artist as David Park and the other Bay Area Figuration movement artist to David Hopper, Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Their heavy paint application and photographic cropping is appropriated to bring these techniques into a modern context.

While like Felix-Gonzalez-Torres, I seek to encode the art with idea of love, loss and desire. More contemporary artist such as John Sonsini and Andrew Salgado can be seen as inspiration. Particularly Sonsini's homage of the mundane day laborers, the physicality of the clothing as well as the subtle distortions of the figure. Within Salgado's work I am inspired by his colorful abstractions and saturation of color inlying the portraits. The expressions on his subjects evoking raw emotion. Reflecting on these artist, my work seeks to illustrate the erosion of these social landscapes over the years though both social media apps change on the way gay men are finding partners as well as societies acceptance of the LGBT+ community.