

An Interview with ANSC's In-House Artist – Matthew McIntosh



Where are you from? How did you decide to come to UConn and what made you enroll into the Animal Science Program?

I lived in Ledyard, CT until I was in first grade, and could not stop talking about/drawing cows, when my parents decided to move to Lisbon, CT where we would have enough land to get some beef animals that I could have as 4-H projects. My interests in cattle and animals in general continued to expand with age, thus UConn's Department of Animal Science seemed like a natural fit. I decided to come to UConn, because I knew I wanted to double major in Fine Arts and Animal Science, and in combination with the advantageous in-state tuition and UConn's prestigious status, it became an even more obvious choice.

What are the two majors you will graduate with? Are you minoring in anything?

I will graduate with Bachelor's Degrees in both Animal Science and Fine Arts with a Concentration in Painting, and a Minor in Art History.

How did you get started in painting? How old were you?

I think I started drawing right out of the womb, or at least that's what my parents would say. My mom used to say that I would get withdrawals from drawing, if I didn't do it enough, and I think I started painting with serious interest in grade school. I didn't advance to oil paints until my senior year of high school.

What are your career goals at this point?

Good question! I think that these paintings have already helped to develop some coherence between my two majors, and I'm hoping that by the time I graduate this question will be much easier to answer. I'm planning to apply to graduate school for both painting and reproductive physiology or genetics simultaneously, as I would love to attain my doctorate in animal science as well as a master's degree in art.

Below, two paintings created specifically for the UConn Department of Animal Science...



How do you choose what you will paint?

A lot of my old artists statements comment on an American nostalgia related to farming and agriculture as tenants of our society which our country was founded on. Most of my artwork focuses around a 'country'-'western' theme per say, although in light of my most recent art classes, I have begun to shift my focus toward more contemporary issues specifically in regards to agricultural, especially because of its many 'hot' topics in the media. In addition to the growing attention our industries are receiving, I think it is especially poignant for me to capitalize on such subject matter, as there are almost no contemporary artists addressing it, and the few who are have primarily depicted advancements in modern agriculture in a negative light. With a postmodern attitude toward notions of transparency, I hope my most recent works challenge both positive and negative views of agriculture to bring to light the truths of facets of agriculture, and more specifically animal science.

How would you describe your painting style? Has it changed over the years? If so, how?

Style is a hard 'thing' to define, because it is inherently a part of the person creating a painting, whereby each brush mark I make is essentially a record of my being. In less ephemeral terms, I generally choose to paint representationally, as I think it best conveys the messages I am trying to get across. Like many modern painters, I struggle between how much abstraction to include in my work, despite my attempts to paint representationally, because a part of painting includes levels of interpretation, and a lot of scholarly rhetoric dictates that a painting too 'photographic' (using photography lightly, as it is its own medium, too) might not leave any room for interpretation and thus defeats its purpose as a piece of work and a comment on society and can become a 'one-liner.' Painters I think to align myself with include Frederick Remington, Charles M. Russell, Edward Hopper, and Andrew Wyeth. I would say that my style has never really changed, but has become more succinct and focused in conjunction with the things I'm trying to convey.

Do your paintings have a message?

I guess each painting has its own message, and hopefully mine are interpretable enough, that they lend themselves to more contextual messages than I have thought to try and imbed. The paintings I have created for the Animal Science Department specifically are landscapes that deal with a long lineage of history which predates Greece. Landscape paintings have taken many forms over the past centuries, although they most commonly include a relatively sweeping view of an outdoor arena, the sky, and some weather elements. Landscapes have many times addressed contemporary agriculture, for instance in Pieter Brueghel the Elder's "The Harvesters"

completed in 1565 or the 19th century Hudson River School, who's members painted sublime vistas of the American landscape. I think that my paintings of our campus barns reflect an American pride in Agriculture, the school's long-standing history as a land grant college, and a contemporary harkening to the "good ol' days," which my newest paintings have begun to contradict alongside with my own enlightenment to the superiority of our modern innovations in contrast to those which presided during the times these barns were constructed in; in this sense, I would say the barn paintings speak to the whole incantation of education, whereby they chronicle our own departments continual advancements as well as the recognition that modern agricultural practices are far superior to those of the recent past.

What piece are you most proud of?

The painting I am most proud of is one titled "Baltic, CT, Spring 2013," whose name is based on the sort-of blatant directional focus that many of the photographers from the Farm Security Administration, a sect of the New Deal of the Great Depression, who focused on the challenges of rural poverty in America would have used. I feel this piece is particularly strong, because it lends itself to a lot of interpretation, both formally and contextually. In short, the run down building, which is ambiguous as an almost billboard-like structure reveals itself as some sort of announcement, and is distinguishable only as a building by a lone, oddly placed window.



The sign, which faintly reads “Blue Seal Feed & Seed” indicates the vacant business’s place within the commodity markets of agriculture. The sign and the oddly placed window make the building distinguishable as a feed store, equipped with a loading dock, flanked by the faint railroad tracks on the left of the image. The seemingly non-traversable snow bank as well as the overgrown vines show that this business is no longer functioning, and the title contextually, then, tells us that this *grain* businesses failure is most likely due to the drought of 2012, increased fuel prices, and a loss of market in Baltic, CT. The film-like stage, which the building is set in, is raptured by an odd light that gives the entire image a disturbingly eerie glow, along with the unnatural purple that makes up the landscape. The light which is coming from a vehicle aligns the viewer, as someone in a car or truck, so that the image is relatable and functions to illustrate anyone’s presence within this turn of events, as they are sure to be impacted directly through the collective loss of this business, increased food prices, increased fuel prices, etc. The title, “Baltic, CT,” further alludes to the fact that Baltic was once a place of prosperity, the home of one of the largest textile factories in the world, and is now a struggling village. A small light to the left of the building could be a reflection, but could also symbolize a train coming down the tracks, or a distant light of hope for the future of the country’s economy and agricultural industries.

What else have you painted besides Animal Science landscape? Anything international? Any famous buildings, tourist attractions, etc...?

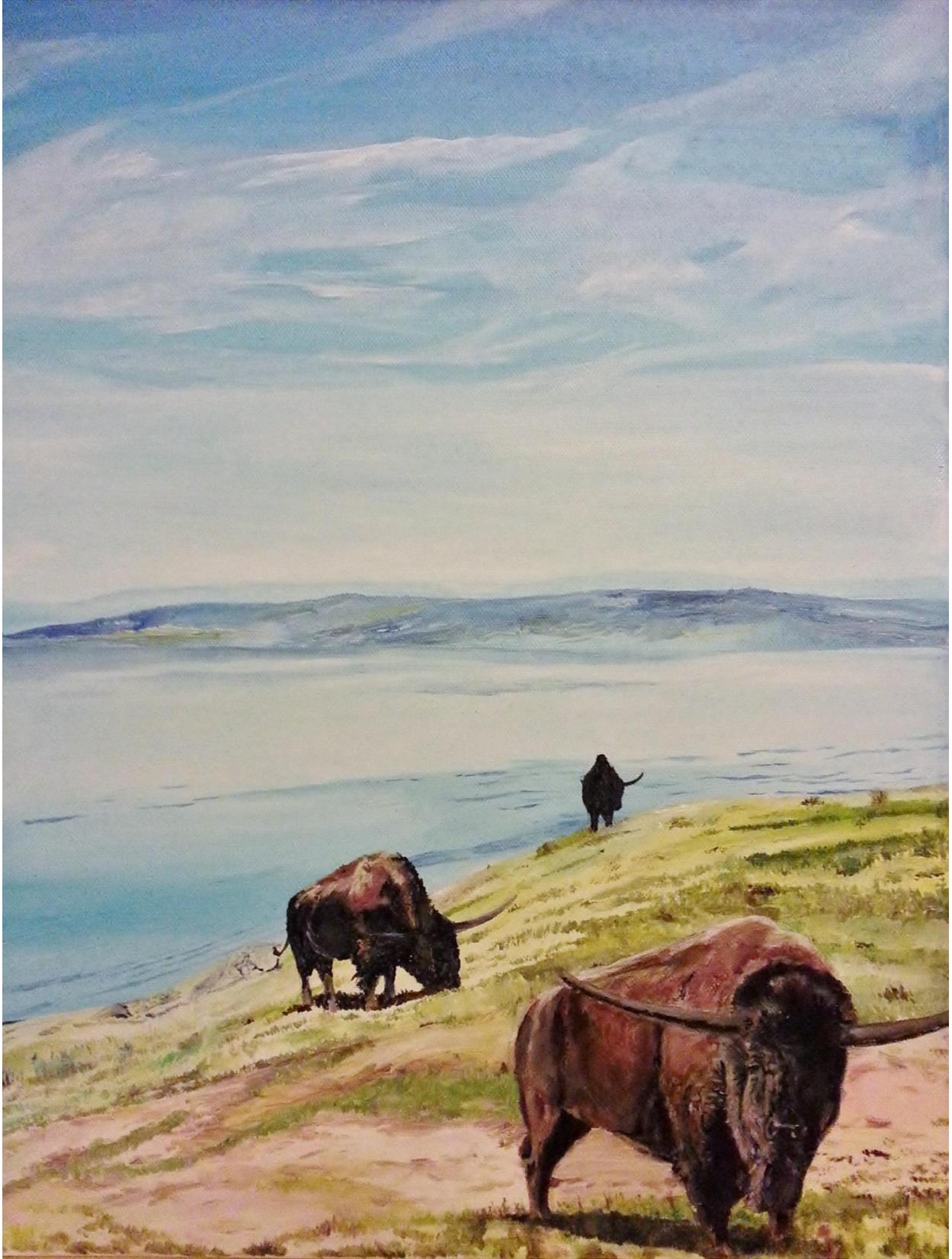
It might be evident that most of my work stems from a “country-western” theme, however, I also contemplated majoring in architecture, another interest of mine, which is often the subject of my work. I have also painted some abstracted pieces dealing with color and pattern. Other pieces hold social commentary outside of the animal science sphere.



Dream House, Oil



A Well Dressed Cowboy, Oil



Bison Latifrons, Oil

What are you working on now?

I'm currently trying to build a portfolio of work that focuses on a few general topics of interest, the first being one which directly stemmed from all of my pre-mentioned interests in contemporary animal science. The second concentration of my portfolio is focused on creating imagery of megafauna from the Pleistocene, which has received little scientific focus and is lacking artistic rendering. Megafauna from the Pleistocene, most notably the Mammoths, Smilodon, and the Dodo have found their way into popular culture as icons of the Ice Age, however, paleontologists have discovered a host of equally interesting and significant animals that might help our own modern understanding of the evolution of animals.

Have you won any awards for your artwork?

I have been fortunate enough to have been the recipient of a few art awards in my past, notably, a multitude at the annual art awards at the Norwich Free Academy, where I attended high school, a Gold Key Portfolio from the Annual Scholastics Art and Writing Awards Council, a Talent award and the Victor Borge Scholarship from UConn, and I have been awarded the Charlotte Fuller Eastman Scholarship for the 2012-2013 year and the 2013-2014 school year which include(d) solo exhibitions at the NFA Bradlaw Gallery.

Any shows or events in the near future?

In addition to being awarded the Charlotte Fuller Eastman Fund, the Norwich Art School at the Norwich Free Academy, has asked me to exhibit at their gallery this winter.

What advice you would give someone who's thinking about learning to paint?

Most of the valuable advice I have about painting, and learning how to, comes from the great professors and school teachers I have had the opportunity to learn from. The basics of painting are similar to those of drawing, and are primarily rooted in understanding color, shape, line, composition, and space. For anyone interested in painting, I think it is of utter importance to look at as many other artists as possible, and to understand the history of painting to some degree. Like many skills, the more one paints, the better they will become. Finally, I think anyone looking to start painting shouldn't hold too many expectations, whereby accidents can often turn out to be blessings, and often some of the quickest completed work is often better than that which took ages to finish. Like making music, painting requires all of the notes, melody, tone,

and pitch to work harmoniously together, thus it takes a lot of time to become a Beethoven, or a Michelangelo.