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Chroma Cowboy

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CHROMA COWBOY

By

JESSICA MARIE GRYDER

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Graphic Design

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2023

CHROMA COWBOY

By

JESSICA MARIE GRYDER, Bachelor of Fine Arts

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ABSTRACT

Chroma Cowboy consists of eleven canvases wrapped in used feed sacks layered with vinyl to create brightly colored narrative scenes. Pulling from Pop Art colors, cubism shapes and a consciousness of materials, I designed this body of work to give the hard-working cowboys, ranchers, and agribusinesses a way to have their stories told to a larger audience. The strain on ranches due to generational changes, politics and environmental circumstances makes it even more important to document this way of life. I strive to further advance and inform the general public's knowledge of the unyielding lifestyle and dedication that it takes to maintain a ranch. Using the transparency and texture provided from the inside of each feed bag, there is a conscious visual relationship between livestock and the food that they eat. Mass produced and commercialized feed sacks represent the efforts ranchers have taken to contemporize this way of life and adapt to the ever-evolving economy. The different scenes depict strenuous labor, idealized landscapes, and provide insight to a fading way of life that few get to experience paired with pops of color that entice the viewer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words cannot express my gratitude to my thesis director, Danny Anguiano, who has assisted me since day one. His guidance and advice have carried me beyond every stage of this paper and exhibition. I would like to thank my committee members, Amanda Breitbach, Lauren Selden, and Marlene Kahla for all their suggestions and in-depth participation they have graciously given me. Their constructive criticism and vast knowledge of art allowed for extensive conversations regarding this project.

I would like to give a special thanks to my dad, Scott Gryder who has graciously and selflessly gifted me with his time, knowledge and experience in woodworking, presentation, and love of agribusiness. Thank you to my mom, Debbie Gryder for her sharp eye and literary knowledge when proofreading. Thank you to the rest of my family, Patrica Hayes, Trisha Gryder and Dylan Cobb for their continuous support and assistance during the writing of my paper and exhibition.

Thank you to each of the ranches that have corresponded with me over the past few months answering questions, sending documents and images, and for their willingness to participate. These include but are not limited to: the Matador Ranch, Hughes Mountain Ranch, and Diamond G Ranch. I express extreme gratitude to the SFA faculty and staff for the continuous feedback and support.

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INTRODUCTION

Growing up on a ranch in Hood County, I have always been immersed in agriculture. My love for animals and the land comes from a deeply rooted ancestry. As a child working cows, riding horses, and driving farm equipment was a conventional practice. It was only when I was older that I realized that the way of life I idealized was becoming less common. It could be said that the cowboy way of life is dying.

My exhibition challenges that perspective. Each vibrant scene and action depict the cowboy way of life, full of hope. This includes traditional aspects including horseback riding, moving cattle, and branding intertwined with modern evolutions of ranching strategies such as working with a drone, four-wheeler and freeze brand. While this style of agribusiness is making way for large cities and housing developments, it is also adapting to survive. In my exhibition, viewers are invited to notice a wall of brands in black vinyl. Each of these represent the mark of a rancher or cowboy who collaborated with this exhibition by sharing research, historic data, or images ranging from early 1900 to present day.

Through the act of viewing each piece, the viewer is invited to immerse themselves in the scene that is before them. Relying on four or five colors to create this Pop Art imagery allows for the audience to mentally tie contemporary ideas with scenes depicting a working farm or ranch. In the same way that a rancher works the land, I arranged and strategically cut and placed the vinyl where I wanted it to go. The roughly

woven background is a tactile representation of the livestock that is displayed throughout the exhibition. These horse, cow, and deer feed bags are the background of each piece just as livestock is the backbone and body of ranching.

When interviewing different ranchers, owner of the Wiggins Ranch in Eureka, Kansas, Mike Wiggins explained what it meant to be a cowboy in today's time saying "because of the diversification...there are more roles you need to play; some days you are a mechanic, marketing person, economist, etc." Wiggins went on to say that they are still very traditional, they have simply adapted as times have changed. Most recent examples of this include becoming a producer of their own beef cattle. During the Covid-19 pandemic, their family developed a brand of spices and rubs to sell alongside their ranch raised premium beef. Wiggins said they still do things on horseback every day, but times have changed.

INFLUENCES

I have taken inspiration from artists such as Frederic Remington, Erwin Smith, and Charles M. Russel for their brightly energetic and captivating scenes depicting early America. Specifically, Remington's pieces such as *The Fall of the Cowboy* and *Modern Comanche* have resonated in my thoughts during the creation of this exhibition.

Several of my pieces, particularly the 12x12" *Vanishing Vaquero* and *Haze Filled Memories* were inspired by *The Fall of the Cowboy*. The idea behind Remington's piece is that the American West is shrinking (Boudreau); long gone are the wide-open ranges, signified in the wooden fence cutting across the painting as well as the ideals that cowboys embody ("The Fall of the Cowboy"). While *The Fall of the Cowboy* is muted and somber, I kept my pieces brighter with a sense that the American West is not gone, merely evolved. The viewer is contributing to this sense as their acknowledgement of the piece is a form of preservation.

Upon further research, I discovered other vinyl artists such as Joel Clark. His vibrant colors and Pop Art influences produce full and captivating images. Although Clark cuts his vinyl by hand and I use a machine, the application style is the same. Looking at his work it is clear to see influences such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. In the traditional Pop Art style, Clark depicts what he knows and loves: Motorsport, similarly to how I have depicted the ranching lifestyle that I know and love.

Using his skill and knowledge of advertising, Clark grabs the viewers' attention and transports them to the Speedway, where they are entranced with bright blurs of color flying around the track represented by the undulating curves in his pieces (Clark).

PROCESS

The idea of cowboys is not a new idea to artists. Years of art, advertising, and media production have allowed the spread of clichés and stereotypes associated with the cowboy. Horses have also been depicted for thousands of years in instances such as cave paintings all the way to modern advertisements of the Budweiser Clydesdales. Famous artists who have gone to great lengths to study the equine form include George Stubbs and his famous *Whistlejacket* painting, Rosa Bonheur's *The Horse Fair*, John Collier's *Lady Godiva* and Eadweard Muybridge's *Horse in Motion*. I found it exciting to capture the horse and its Western counterparts in each piece.

Starting with a mixture of used equine sweet feed bags, powdery and textured cattle cubes and even deer corn, feed sacks are the backbone of each piece, grounding the work in reality. Using three different bags allows for different textures, patterns and transparencies. For example, the Producer's Pride 20% Cattle Cubes bag uses larger strips woven together to form an opaque background while Producer's Pride 12% Sweet Feed consists of a much smaller pattern and is overall translucent. Each of the bags come from a working ranch in Granbury, Texas where I grew up that produces Brangus cattle, registered Longhorns and working Quarter Horses.

Each bag is left for at least 10 hours under a weighted plank in order to flatten the majority of wrinkles and deformations. These bags are then carefully measured and cut to be stretched around various sizes of canvases. The canvas is used as additional support

and represents the way ranches rely on outside businesses to flourish. Placing the printed side of the feed sack on the inside allows for the grainy, gritty stains and crumbs to be subtly visible on the outside around the vinyl that is applied later. I worked with a partner to stretch and staple the feed bags to the back of the canvas, conscious of the orientation of the finished vinyl.



Figure 1 Feed sack documentation

Due to the overlays and wrinkles in the feed sacks, each canvas had to be measured individually, and I built unique frames designed to fit each specific piece. The frames are cut and covered with black spray paint, then left overnight to dry. After drying, each piece is coated another one or two times with the matte black paint. The

frame is then set aside for a later use and a French cleat is attached to the back of each piece.

For the body of each piece, I combine photographs that I had recently taken or digitally collaged images depicting the working cowhand that were appropriated from online sources. Other images came from ranchers around the United States who agreed to send in modern or historical images displaying their history. These included the Matador Ranch, Hughes Mountain Ranch, o6 Ranch, King Ranch, Diamond G Ranch, and a few that wished to remain anonymous. Each image is carefully selected due to an aspect or scene that represents the American cowboy's way of life, like checking on cows, roping, riding, or branding. Once I am satisfied with the digital image, I use Adobe Illustrator to select the main four to six colors from each image thus creating an abstract scene. The step back from realism allows for basic shapes and overlays to create an engaging and inviting piece. For example, this Figure 2 captures the viewer's attention but holds historic weight as well. The Kokernot o6 Ranchers that allowed the use of their image, said they are one of the only ranches that still uses a chuck wagon in their round-ups.



Figure 2 o6 Ranch historical photograph



Figure 3 Digital Rendering of o6 Photograph (all colors).....13

Figure 4 Digital Rendering of o6 Photograph (one color).....13

Saving each color as separate files, I transferred each design to cut vinyl via a Silhouette machine. While the Silhouette can only cut sheets that are 12x12,” it takes multiple sheets and precision to place the vinyl together in the correct order once cut. Weeding the background from each sheet of vinyl allows for a preview of the completed piece. One of the ways I was able to break from stereotypes was in the color selection I used. Instead of only using earthen tones such as brown, tan, black, and gray, I grab the viewers’ attention by using bright blues, metallic silver and gold, yellow, red, and pink that not only modernize the exhibition but acknowledge the flashy rodeo scenes that promote and preserve the American Cowboy as well.

After each series of color is cut and weeded, I measure and line up the vinyl for application on the stretched feed sacks. In some instances, like when using the Producer’s Pride 12% Sweet Feed sacks, the printed image and words will show through. I kept this in mind and placed the vinyl purposefully in a relationship with it. If the viewer moves closer or further away, the feed sack becomes more or less translucent.

Typically, I leave the vinyl and canvas under a weight to adhere together overnight. Placing the frame pieces around the work, I nail them together using an air gun, and the piece is complete. The viewer is invited to interactively walk back and forth in the gallery for different viewpoints of each piece. The faces are purposely unidentifiable, inviting the viewer to fill in the void with a memory or recognition that is unique to them.

WORKS

Chroma Cowboy is a series consisting of 18 machine-cut vinyl images mounted on feed sacks and framed in black wood. A smaller series of work is made up of seven 12x12" scenes framed in reclaimed base molding. Working at a custom motorhome repair company, I was able to learn the skills and tricks in applying vinyl to various objects. Similar to the relationship between traditional cowboy culture and modern-day advances, there is a direct correspondence between the technology used to cut and layer the vinyl with the feed sacks and surrounding wood frames.

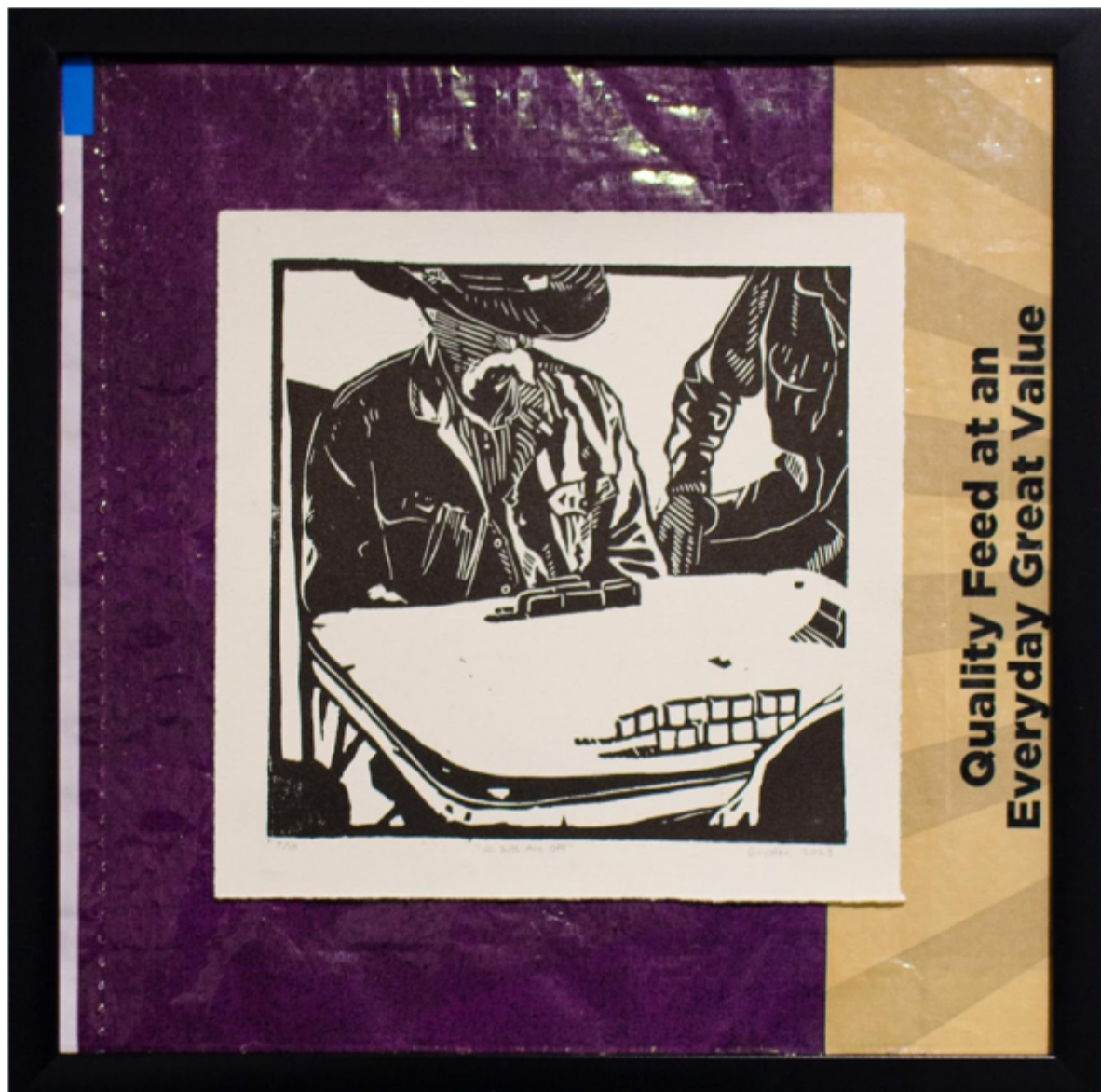


Figure 5 All Bets Are Off



Figure 6 Imagining the Kirk Ranch



Figure 7 Fading Fast



Figure 8 The Afterglow



Figure 9 The Flint Hills



Figure 10 Somethin' In The Orange



Figure 11 Prince TSMU Rhett



Figure 12 Red Roan 1 & 2



Figure 13 Running on Faith and Gasoline



Figure 14 Wet Saddle Blankets Make Good Horses



Figure 15 Texas Trio



Figure 16 Fight or Flight

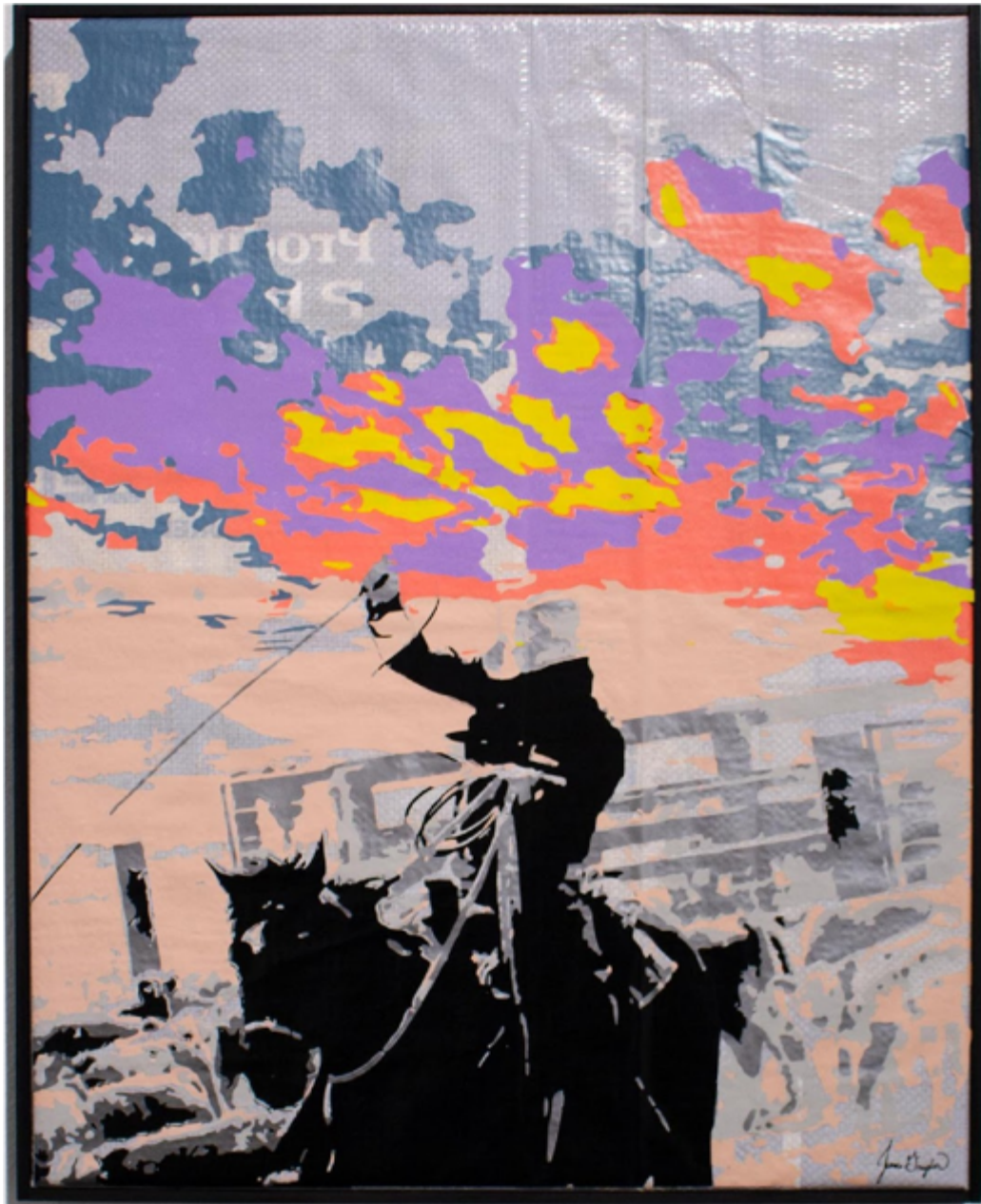


Figure 17 Chroma Cowboy



Figure 18 Heeling Horse



Figure 19 One of the Last



Figure 20 Blue Genes



Figure 21 She's Somewhere In The Smokey Mountain Rain

EXHIBITION



Figure 22 Chroma Cowboy Exhibition Title



Figure 23 Exhibition Photo 1

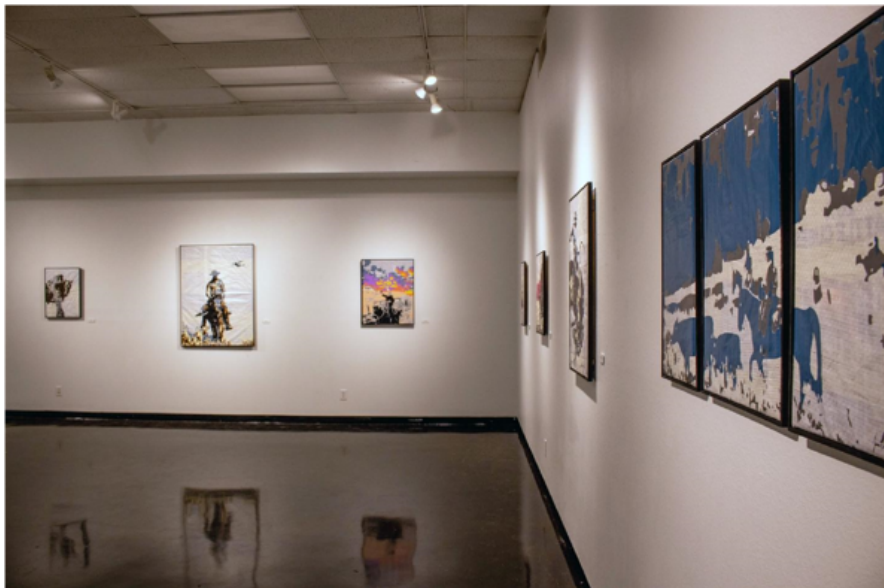


Figure 24 Exhibition Photo 2

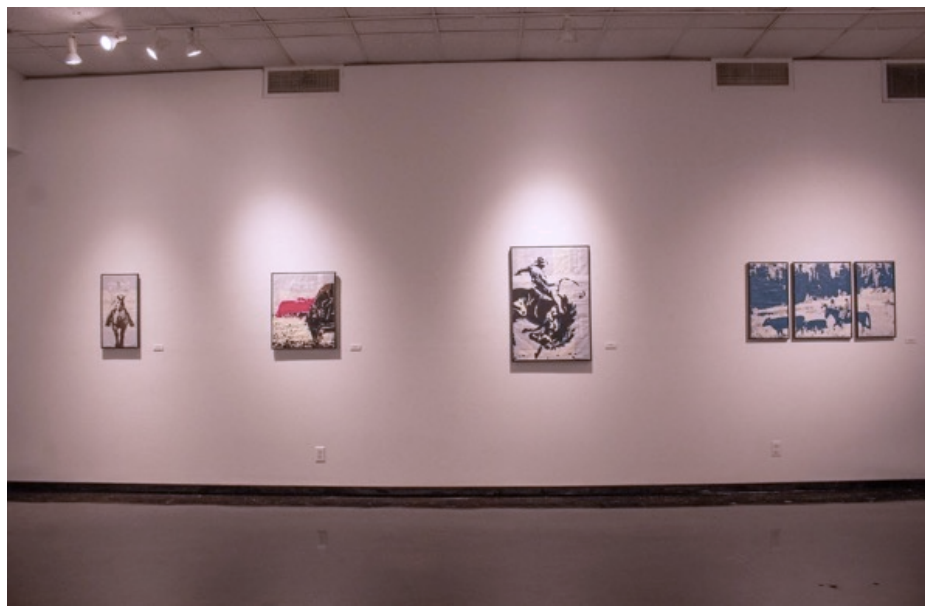


Figure 25 Exhibition Photo 3



Figure 26 Exhibition Photo

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VITA

Jessica Gryder entered Wayland Baptist University in 2016 after the completion of Granbury High School. In 2017, she transferred to McMurry University where she obtained her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design. During this time she studied abroad in London where she focused on travel photography and European art history. Upon graduation in 2020, Jessica entered the Graduate School of Stephen F. Austin State University. In the summer of 2022 she studied abroad with the Santa Reparata International School of Art in Florence, Italy. She received her Master of Fine Arts degree in Graphic Design with a secondary focus in Photography in 2023.

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MLA Style, 9th edition

This thesis was typed by Jessica Gryder.