



Michael Schliefke is a painter.

Born in Schenectady, New York, I spent my childhood following my family move around the Northeast. The constant moving and unsettled roots infused me with a curious sense of wanderlust. I'm intrigued by art, art history, new cities, and the intoxication of hearing people's stories.

Growing up on a steady diet of watching Warner Bros. cartoons, I soaked up a world of psychological defects, Vaudevillian humor combined with stereotyped wacky travelogs and outdated cultural references. Early on I became obsessed with the glossy, incredible promises of infomercials, absurdity of David Letterman and the unregulated bombast of otherworldly southern preachers on far reaching AM stations.

Fortunately, I escaped the provincial bonds of New England by attending art school in Kansas City, and began a vagabond lifestyle of traveling and seeing new places. Graced with the opportunity to live abroad in Ireland and taking multiple self guided grand tours of Europe, I settled back in the US in Austin, Texas. It's in Austin where my art career began and blossomed in earnest. Over twelve years in the constantly changing city, I produced loads of new work and took on interesting side projects. I spent endless amounts of time and energy inspiring fellow artists and the general public alike with a series of ever more ambitious group art shows and events.

I returned to Kansas City in 2014 where I have further honed my craft, marrying my love of art history and knowledge of painting in new, maturing bodies of work. Having lived a solitary life during the pandemic, I have resumed teaching private painting and drawing classes from my studio while taking the opportunities to travel abroad and be inspired once again.



ARTIST STATEMENT

The paintings and drawings I create rely on constantly evolving imagery that most recently has included charging bulls, rodeo clowns and shipwrecked boats. This imagery serves as allegories to the state of the world and my own psyche. Whether ruminating over overt political satire, lost relationships, tales of triumph or more likely, abject failure, all my paintings have a story to tell. My work often alludes to ancient myths, religious stories, and current events. I enjoy using overblown visions and American spectacle to entice the viewer into my world.

My paintings tell stories of woe, loss, regret and yearning for something substantial in a world of grift, greed and deceit. With society trembling in septic shock and the environment crumbling, every year it becomes harder to not point fingers and lampoon the guilty parties. In spite of the thoughtless and uncaring world around me, I believe art, painting, and true shared human experiences are more vital than ever. It's the defiant, seemingly futile act of creating art that implores me to paint.

Composition and color are the framework on which I build my work. Evoking beauty is important to me. Paintings are real, vital objects, not empty images you can just finger through on a screen. I want my paintings to have a physical presence and sensual feel, with paint applied similar to the crescendos and bombast of a symphony. The visual language I use in my work is informed by my love of Old Masters, from Titian, Rubens, Delacroix and Velasquez, infused with highlights of modernism - Beckmann, Diebenkorn, and Jack Levine.

**College Days (1993-1997)**

After years of less than rigorous public education art classes, I began my study of art in earnest with a variety of classes at MassArt and the Art Institute of Boston. I then studied under Richard Mattsson, Michael Walling and Lester Goldman in Kansas City. A lot of my college work centered around finding how my hand worked and rigorously catching up on drawing and painting basics fortified with a comprehensive study of art history. During my senior year, my influences and style began to develop in a series of brightly colored carnival and sideshow paintings. This began my long standing use of grifters, sexual innuendo, and love of crass spectacle in my work. I helped pay for the expense of college by spending my breaks from school touching up and stretching tens of thousands of mass produced oil paintings from China in a nondescript warehouse outside Boston.

The Early Years (1997-2001)

After graduation, I concentrated on cementing a viable studio work ethic and further my study of oil painting. This was fortified by being lucky enough to make frequent trips throughout Europe. A study of Titian, Rubens and Delacroix combined with my love of Beckmann and Diebenkorn to produce haphazard, exploratory paintings created at night between shifts at my day job. I played along as a data quality analyst at a booming dotcom company in dire need of employees who could think on their feet and produce at high levels. I was able to convince the company my talents were needed overseas, and I spent a year living in Cork, Ireland. It was there I honed my writing skills, produced satirical portraits of US presidents and various charcoal drawings.

The Austin Years (2002-2014)

Upon my return to the United States, I quit my job and moved to Austin, Texas, then still a cozy hamlet of wildly creative folks with a severely underdeveloped art scene. I became involved with Blue Genie Art, a small and ultra creative collection of artists producing large scale corporate sculptures, murals and an array of odd art projects. I soon worked together with Bolm Studios, now Big Medium, where I had the infrastructure to put together a series of large, popular and successful award winning group art shows. I was part of the East Austin Studio Tour at its onset as both behind the scenes and as an active showing artist. I established myself financially by teaching private painting and drawing classes from my studio. After a few years of intense painting and showing, I also took some time away from painting to write, draw and publish three



comic books satirizing hipsters and the gentrification of East Austin. I returned to painting in my studio and showed often, using open gallery resources to my advantage. My work solidified into bringing personal stories into new imagery. With nods to mythology, religion, and history (both world and art), my sarcastic and often sardonic work progressed with new levels of confidence, technique and ability. Common themes of spurned lovers, political satire and loss mirrored my constant searching for real meaning and relationships among the illusions we all chase. Before I left Austin I was inducted into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame as a member of both Blue Genie and Big Medium.

Return to Kansas City (2014- present day)

I left Austin as it was changing into a capital city of tech bro dullards and rich libertarian douchebags with no sense of its history, traditions or culture. I arrived back in Kansas City in the throes of an increasingly decomposing, toxic relationship and the loss of my father. Worn down and relatively aimless, my work returned to its basic roots - working out compositions and thick paint application in series of boxers and matadors, mimicking my own battles and mindset. Establishing a new studio in northeast Kansas City, my work started to become unabashedly political again during the Trump years starting with a series of rodeo clown paintings. Decked out in red, white and blue, the spectacle of bravado and foolishness of rodeo clowns getting chased by bulls were used as a metaphor for the era complete with Republican slogans ('Tired of Winning!') as titles for the work. I perfectly timed a large show of forty plus paintings in November 2019, followed by a month-long trip reinvigorating my soul in Paris, Stockholm and Warsaw. The pandemic arrived, along with police riots, Republican governance and insurrections that provided the backbone of my next body of work, the Greatest Hits of 2020-2022. I mused on environmental and manmade American disasters affecting the world in a series of drawings featuring shipwrecked and landlocked boats. With the draining nature of political satire almost behind me, I launched into a new series of paintings in 2023 contorting the boat imagery onto the River Styx in an abstracted version of Charon ferrying passengers to the Underworld.

**schliefkevision.com**

The website was born out of a bad joke in January 2003, necessitating a place for dumb aspects of my life I can't capture on canvas. Over the years, the website has documented my art, art projects and other frivolous stories from my life. It's where my students find my art classes, and about 6-10 people a day from across the globe read my clever observations about the painting techniques of Norman Rockwell.

My website has constantly morphed over the years, with regular redesigns every couple of years or so. It has settled into documenting my various travels around the globe along with reviews of art I've stumbled upon. Every month I write a new studio update providing anybody unlucky enough to read them insight into my work processes and mindset behind my canvases.

Travel

There is nothing more comforting and reinvigorating than traveling. I lived in Ireland in 2001, and have visited Europe six times, crisscrossing the continent soaking up all the culture, food and art that I can. Every journey is poorly planned and I let the winds take me where they may. These robust journeys have taken me to 21 countries and 38 states.

I watched a full lunar eclipse with a bottle of wine on the marble sidewalks of Dubrovnik, almost fell in love in Warsaw, and have been fortunate enough to witness the effects of communism in Eastern Europe before capitalism fully swept in. I celebrated New Years 2000 waltzing on the Danube in Vienna and once spent four straight days visiting the Louvre.

The constant of my travels has been to see and study as much art as I can and enjoying the solitude of not understanding any language besides English. Besides an ability to blend in with the locals wherever I go, I try to meet as many people as I can, where you really find out about the history, views and mindsets of every locale.

One of my goals is to spend a year gawking at the depth and variety of Catholic relics throughout Europe and to start to visit more foreign lands, hopefully starting with Japan and Korea in 2023.

**Oil painter** (1997 - present)

I draw and paint whatever I feel like at the time. I put together shows, sketch and think too long on dumb ideas. I write dumb shit on my website. I wake up each day and do it again.

Painting and Drawing Teacher (2003-present)

Teach private lessons to a wide variety of students out of my studio.

Assorted Art Jobs (2002 - present)

Murals, decorative interior work, very rare commissions, and various art related woodworking projects. Art department of two reality TV shows and other art jobs.

Lyric Opera of Kansas City (2014-2016)

Worked under charge painter Gen Goering on the production of sets for various operas.

Fake Decorative Artist (here and there)

Bitterly ironic project selling beautiful decorative paintings on art websites under a pseudonym online. Collected in over a half dozen countries and twenty five states.

Really White Vigilante (2007-2009)

Created, wrote and drew three comic books satirizing the hipster gentrification of East Austin.

Bolm Studios (Big Medium) (2003-2014)

Assisted with the development and production of the East Austin Tour for its first decade of existence. Created and curated a series of large group shows and art events.

Blue Genie Art (2002-2014)

Contract artist, large scale art projects for a variety of national and international clients. Painted, sculpted, installed art, exhibits, and museum displays. Created art shows and events.

United Oil Paintings (1994 -1998)

Touched up thousands of decorative hand painted landscape paintings from China, stretched thousands and thousands more to help pay for college.



SHOWS



Solo shows of my original oil paintings over the years. I consider each show an album of sorts, containing a few hits, some odd, yet interesting b-sides, all centered off a central theme. Every show is reflective of the times and my mindset at the time, sometimes delving into personal stories or dipping into more blatant political satire.

- *Don't You Blow Your Big Top*
November 7, 2019 West Bottoms Kansas City, Missouri
- *Bulls___ On Parade*
February – June, 2018 Hank Charcuterie, Lawrence, Kansas
- *Boxing Show*
March 25 – May 21, 2016 Hank Charcuterie, Lawrence, Kansas
- *The Last Waltz*
May 2014 Blue Genie Art, Austin, Texas
- *Accumulation & Interruption*
July 2013 Pump Project, Austin, Texas
- *What if We Could Get it All Back?*
April 2006 Bolm Studios, Austin, Texas
- *A Hopeless Romance*
August 2005 Galerie Jean Moulin, Austin, Texas
- *Cool Struttin'*
June 2004 Bolm Studios, Austin, Texas
- *American Paintings*
May 2004 Mojo's Daily Grind, Austin, Texas
- *Appetite for Destruction*
February 2003 Mojo's Daily Grind, Austin, Texas



CURATED SHOWS AND EVENTS



Self produced large group shows and art events curated by Michael Schlieffe. These shows featured between six and sixty artists, some concentrating strictly on painting while others became outlandish art related events that included various levels of participation and energy from the teeming masses that witnessed the events:

- *The Game Show*
July 21-23, 2016 River Market Event Place, Kansas City, Missouri
- *Holiday Art Market*
December 2015 River Market Event Place, Kansas City, Missouri
- *Danger Derby 3*
November 2014 Blue Genie Art, Austin, Texas
- *Danger Derby 2*
November 2013 Blue Genie Art, Austin, Texas
- *Danger Derby*
November 2012 Blue Genie Art, Austin, Texas
- *Biblical Proportions*
April 2009 Blue Genie Art and Bearded Lady, Austin, Texas
- *Taking Life Seriously*
July 2007 Bolm Studios, Austin, Texas
- *Radical Nautical*
August 2007 Gallery Lombardi, Austin, Texas
- *Father's Day Show*
June 2006 Bolm Studios, Austin, Texas
- *Unicorn Art Show*
November 2005 Bolm Studios, Austin, Texas
- *Shoulda Been a Plumber Too*
October 2004 Bolm Studios, Austin, Texas
- *(Six Painters trying to Make it) While We're Young*
April 2004 Blue Genie Art, Austin, Texas
- *Shoulda Been a Plumber*
October 2003 Blue Genie Art, Austin, Texas



Awards

- 2015: Artist Inc. Scholarship
- 2014: Austin Arts Hall of Fame: inducted as a member of Blue Genie Art
- 2014: Austin Arts Hall of Fame: inducted as a member of Big Medium (Bolm Studios)
- 2006: Top 10 Visual Art Things of 2006, Austin Chronicle: Fathers Day Show
- 2005: Top Theme/Group Art Exhibition of 2005, Austin Chronicle: Unicorn Art Show

Self Published Art Projects

- Really White Vigilante comic book, Volume One, 2007, 62 pages
- Really White Vigilante comic book, Volume Two, 2008, 66 pages
- Really White Vigilante comic book, Volume Three, 2009, 70 pages

Other Stuff

- 2005's *Unicorn Art Show* started on a whim, but ended up with 63 artists making unicorn art in a wide variety of mediums. The show featured curated awards and transformed three gallery spaces into a unicorn playland. Show was named Best of the Year and attendance was estimated at over 1200 people.
- Appeared in a one page interview in the AV Club section of the Nov 8, 2007 print edition of the Onion discussing my side project, the satirical comic book '*Really White Vigilante*'.
- Co-created and produced the *Danger Derby*, a no holds barred pinewood derby race with the public and artists building art cars to race against a 120' track filled with jumps, a fire pit and swinging anvils. Produced two more larger Danger Derbys in successive years.
- '*Biblical Proportions*' was a two gallery show featuring art from over 50 artists. The Old Testament and New Testament shows opened during Easter weekend.
- The '*Father's Day Show*' hosted real and imagined portraits of artists' fathers. Featured a cookout with an astroturfed 'lawn' outside the gallery. Attendees were given free hot dogs.
- '*The Game Show*' - just lost out on a Charlotte Street Rocket Grant, but was encouraged to 'continue on' because it's 'interesting to see what artists can do without a budget'. I hired a band that wrote original game show songs, hosted a show of artwork from 25 artists and held a live game show spectacle with contestants and prizes.