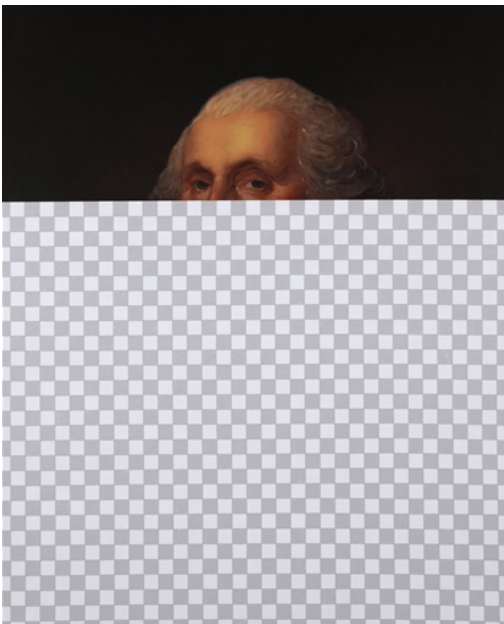


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ARTS

By Felicity Carter

## Figurative Paintings-Meet-Digi Culture For Shawn Huckins' Latest Exhibition



'Nothing Rhymes With Orange' (George Washington, White House Art Collection Erasure No. 5)

US artist Shawn Huckins juxtaposes the classic with the contemporary. In his latest exhibition, *Fool's Gold*, which is now showing at the Modernism Gallery in San Francisco, he merges traditional figurative painting with bleeding-edge digital culture.

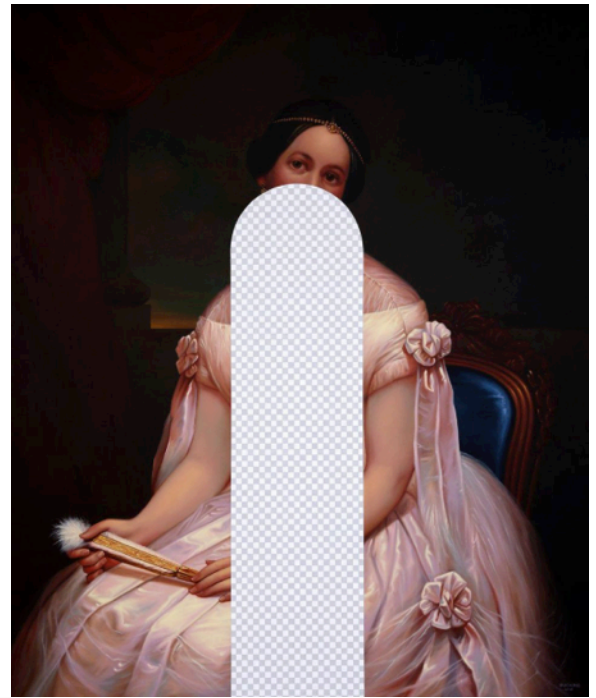
Presented in this body of work is a mix of content, techniques as well as ideas and ideals from the past and present. Through his eighteen paintings, Huckins reimagines masterpieces from the White House collection. He repaints works by Stewart and Bierstadt, Charles Wilson Peale and William Merritt Chase,

bringing them right up to date with an Adobe Photoshop file finish. Huckins simulates digital erasures as he selectively replaces portions

with patches of gray-and-white checkerboard identical to the pattern that Photoshop users see when they delete sections of digital photos. "The underlying works chosen for this series originally served as testaments of those who came before us and the indelible mark they left on the world. In an era where the internet makes everyone a publisher, and digital editing tools bestow the power to create realities out of pixels, these works examine our assumptions regarding the longevity of individual influence and institutions." Huckins crafts these paintings by hand in acrylic on canvas, working from archival images stored on the White House Historical Association website. He uses techniques perfected in his last series, exhibited at Modernism in 2016, which in a similar form mixed classic American paintings with textual overlays from Twitter.

## Tell us about the thought process behind this

**exhibition...**I had the idea of the 'Erasure' series shortly after our current president was elected back in November of 2016. Previous to this body of work, I would combine 18th and 19th-century American portraiture with current day digital lingo, such as LOL or ROFL, to make a statement on the evolution (or de-evolution depending on how you see it) of language. With this new work, my thought process changed from studying language to the fragility of legacy and how easy it is to 'erase' someone's hard-fought, genuinely good policies with a simple swipe of a pen or a dead of night tweet. With our current administration, it seems like they are purposely choosing to undo parts of history that are, for the most part, beneficial for the health and well being of American society (ie, environmental protections, health care, etc.) After the



'He Said. She Said. She Said.' (Julia Gardiner Tyler, White House Art Collection Erasure No. 18)

election, I didn't quite know how to resolve this idea of legacy. One day, I stumbled upon a book at an antique store titled 'Art In The White House, A Nation's Pride' by William Kloss and the idea came to me instantly. I would 'erase' paintings from The White House Art Collection, which would be my response to our current administration's toxic and divisive policies. Each painting is meticulously replicated followed by superimposed 'erasure' marks (also painted) found in editing software. The superimposed editing marks on The Erasure paintings vary from random, visceral swipes covering part of the subject or a small part of the work, to structured, rectilinear shapes verging on overtaking the underlying image completely. Whether erasure is portrayed as a temperamental outburst or a methodically executed plan, the resulting obliteration is much the same. It is only in the series titles that we detect resistance to such a redaction of history.

**Is there a particular piece that you feel the most connection with?** I really have two. One, Nothing Rhymes With Orange (George Washington, White House Art Collection Erasure No. 5), as I think it's a powerful statement in our current state of affairs. In this piece, George Washington is emerged in erasure to just underneath his eyes. He seems to be looking over the chaos or 'wall of erasure' to see how far we've come, or how far we are going backward. Would he be proud of where we are today, or ashamed? And two, The Most Beautiful Place Is Far From Here (Rocky Mountain Scene, White House Art Collection Erasure No. 16). I connected with this piece, particularly because, to date, it's the largest painting I have ever created, as well as the most challenging. I typically work with portraiture, so tackling a large scale landscape with incredible amounts of detail was certainly new territory for my body of work. And being a lover of the outdoors, it's also a statement on how aggressive this government seems to be against clean air and water and is reversing key policies that would protect the environment for generations.

**How has your style evolved?** In this latest work, I'm getting more ambitious with 'destroying' the original work. I say destroying, but really altering the painting to make a statement of this unprecedented government. I typically stay away from politics and my work is usually playful with underlying hints of humor. This time around, I just had to say something with this new work, as I feel it's an artist's job to make these statement in however form he or she can express them and to not sit in idle mode.

**What's the end game for you?** It's hard to define an endgame as everyone approaches my work in numerous ways. In short, I want people to view my work and appreciate the underlying message of how fragile legacy is and how easy it is to alter someone's legacy with 'alternative facts.' It's also pleasing when a viewer compliments my work on how technically skillful they are and realize my works are physical paintings and not digital replications.

*Fool's Gold* is running until September 8, 2018

Modernism Gallery, San Francisco, CA

[www.modernisminc.com](http://www.modernisminc.com)



'The Most Beautiful Place Is Far From Here' (Rocky Mountain Scene, White House Art Collection Erasure No. 16)