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Surrealism and Postmodernism in Gregory Abbott's *Remlack Too*

Elizabeth Helen Donakey

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores Gregory Abbott's *Remlack Too*, particularly in its fusion of surrealism and postmodernism. It addresses the ways in which *Remlack Too* highlights the artist's experience with sleep apnea, but acknowledges that this is only one level of understanding the painting. Other layers are realized through a study of surrealism and postmodernism. This research analyzes the ways in which surrealism and postmodernism work together, including through their lack of style, fluidity in definition, incorporation of semiotics, distrust in science, reliance on psychoanalysis, and especially through postmodernism's appropriating of earlier artistic movements. This thesis reviews the previously overlooked elements of postmodernism in Abbott's oeuvre. By exploring some of the binary pairs found in *Remlack Too*, such as life and death, sleep and wake, and logic and irrational, Abbott reveals his hopes for a more open-minded and accepting society.

Keywords: Surrealism, Postmodernism, Gregory Abbott, Binary Pairs, Sleep Apnea
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When contemporary American artist Gregory Abbott was in preschool, his teacher tried telling him to correct the color of his skies—not to be bothered by her criticism, he simply responded, “No, my skies are red. You can paint your skies any color you want to, but in my picture, it’s red.”¹ Seventy years later, he still felt just as protective about his style and unique way of seeing the world. Though less concerned with the color of his skies, Abbott’s art is still different from that created by many of the artists that surround him in St. George, a city in Southern Utah, and due to this distinctiveness, a viewer of his work may wonder how to situate him within the larger context of the art world. However, when studied with a wider lens, it is clear that Abbott’s work, particularly his painting Remlack Too (2015) (Fig. 1), is a combination of two larger movements.

Abbott’s paintings and mixed media works, though created in the latter end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, are often described as surrealist in style. Previous discussions of Abbott’s work are brief and found only in exhibition reviews and data collections.² They identify the artist’s style as surrealist, but fail to address the significance of a late twenty- and early twenty-first-century artist working in this vein. Beyond these reviews

¹ Gregory Abbott, interview by the author, St. George, UT, January 15, 2018.
and regional museum biographies, Abbott’s work is generally mentioned only briefly in surveys of Utah Art because it is where he has spent the majority of his career.

Looking at Abbott’s works only as surrealist art fails to acknowledge the contemporary issues he addresses in them. While surrealism is certainly a strong component of Abbott’s works, they are also fundamentally postmodern. This thesis, which addresses Abbott’s pieces not only as surrealist but also postmodern, is the first in-depth research of his work and is an important recognition of the relationship between surrealist and postmodern art. He is significant not only because he combines surrealism and postmodernism, but because he is part of a larger group of reputable artists doing something very similar. Abbott demonstrates the fusing of these larger traditions, and reflects ideas about living in the twenty-first century through his painting Remlack Too, a work inspired by his own life. Abbott believes his work must “breathe of this time.”

Thus, he explores contemporary issues within his paintings, as is apparent in Remlack Too.

Due to the limited attention Abbott has received in scholarship, a viewer may wonder how significant Remlack Too is and what it means. Exploring the surrealist and postmodern elements within the piece provide answers to these questions. Remlack Too reveals Abbott’s beliefs on how one should approach topics of his cultural climate: open-mindedly and with more full representation from different voices. This thesis will explore the ways in which surrealism and postmodernism work together, as well as works through the nuances of Abbott’s postmodern surrealist style in particular. With this as a foundation, it will then explore the contemporary relevance of Remlack Too through a discussion of its binary pairs. Abbott’s desire to be non-discriminatory of others and accepting—even searching for—different perspectives is a need of the twenty-first century reflected in Remlack Too.

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3 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
As this thesis explores the layers at work in *Remlack Too*, it relies on multiple methodological approaches. In part, it relies on biographical information about the artist. It also looks at the cultural factors surrounding Abbott and historical components of his style. Cultural climate and a sense of self are common components of postmodern art, so they will give a more comprehensive understanding of Abbott’s work. It will also rely on iconography. Abbott is aware of his artistic ancestors, so understanding their iconography informs his own work. It also relies on structuralist theory in addressing the binary pairs found in Abbott’s painting. Combined, these multiple perspectives reveal further layers in Abbott’s work. They will each be necessary in understanding the relationship between surrealism and postmodernism, particularly through *Remlack Too*. They indicate that Abbott works within a larger tradition than what he has previously been given credit for, and demonstrate his desire for widespread representation.

**Situating Abbott and *Remlack Too***

Knowing that surrealist and postmodernist art highlight characteristics or beliefs of the artist, it is important to become acquainted with Abbott, his beliefs, and the culture he is a part of in order to better understand his art. Greg Abbott was born in 1945 and grew up in Southern California. On weekends, his parents would make the two-hour drive from their home in Bakersfield to Los Angeles to visit museums. These museum visits impacted Abbott’s work for decades as he recalled his first encounter with Dali, Miro, Ernst, and other artists at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. He was particularly enamored with Dali’s work. As a young teenager, Abbott attended an exhibition featuring Dali’s art and noticed that two labels had been incorrectly hung, mixing up two pieces. At first, when he notified the guard of the mistake, the guard did not take Abbott seriously, but after verifying, the labels were corrected by museum
Abbott’s love of surrealism developed when he was young and it became an integral part of his own art throughout his career.

Abbott has never been afraid to push boundaries with his art. When he was twelve years old, Abbott painted his uncle’s water tower. However, rather than painting it a solid gray as his uncle expected, Abbott painted a giant reclining nude on the tower. Abbott’s uncle was not amused and had Abbott paint over the figure with the original gray. His parents were particularly open-minded. They allowed him to join an art league in high school that brought up models from Los Angeles in order to give the teenagers an opportunity to practice studying the human figure and paint nudes.

Abbott has always been particular about his style as an artist. He attended Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah for one semester. BYU is owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and was particularly conservative in the 1960s. For his final project in his painting class, Abbott painted two nude life-size women on a bench. Although he grew up a member of this church, he could not understand why students seemed upset at him as he carried around his final project. His instructors were also bothered by the painting and would not allow him to display it for his final critique. Transferring to the California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) allowed him more freedoms in his art that he felt he did not have at BYU. When he attended CCAC, he was still sure of what his style. Furthermore, because his professors in California discouraged being part of a movement, his training was less about forming his style and more about technical improvement.

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4 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
Abbott received his BFA in 1970 and his MFA in 1972, both from CCAC. He had additional exposure to art history in college, and his continued visits to museums in California deepened his understanding of art history. Four years after graduating, Abbott moved to Utah. He was ready for an escape from city life and his parents had since relocated to Salt Lake City. Abbott alternated living in Salt Lake City and St. George before ultimately settling in St. George. He met his wife years later while living in St. George.

After decades of living and working in Utah as a full-time painter and interior designer, however, his art still does not look like much of the art produced by other Utah artists. Of his own work, Abbott explained:

> I think my style is really different than anybody’s. I haven’t run into anybody’s that looks like something I would do. I have this surreal bent from a child that I still play around with. I still look at things very differently that way…but I don’t think I’m really regional. I live [in St. George] and almost everybody down here is so landscape oriented. They have their big show over here every year and I would say 75% of it is paintings of Zion [National Park]. I’m not much of a landscape painter.

Utah art is and has been primarily dominated by landscapes for over 170 years. As scholar Vern Swanson explained, “Landscape is Utah’s most significant genre, the one to which many of our most talented artists apply themselves.” Painting landscapes does not interest Abbott, however, so they very rarely appear in his work. Just as he felt in preschool, Abbott is content adhering to his own style without feeling the need to conform to the style of other artists. In addition to Western American landscapes, Utah artists have produced still lifes, and portraiture, and the last several decades have introduced abstract art. Utah art is also heavily informed by religion,

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7 Ibid.  
8 Ibid.  
9 Ibid.  
10 Vern G. Swanson, Robert S. Olpin and William C. Seifrit, *Utah Painting and Sculpture* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 1997), 214.
especially that of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Though Abbott is a member of the church, his works rarely present overt religious symbols or references. 11 Outside of these few groupings, dada, surrealist, and other categories have been comparably smaller, and researched even less within the discourse of Utah art. Perhaps it is because Abbott’s style does not fit neatly within these dominant categories and is not particularly regional that he has not received more scholarly attention. Looking at Abbott’s work only through the lens of a Utah tradition not only misses the main messages in his paintings, but it also fails to recognize him as part of a much larger artistic community.

The “surrealist bent” from Abbott’s childhood never left his work, but personal experiences also inform his art. In the early 2000s, Abbott was diagnosed with sleep apnea, a condition wherein an individual stops breathing during the night, causing them to feel unrested throughout the day. Abbott was given a sleep apnea mask called a CPAP machine (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure), but slept even less while wearing it. He complained that the mask made “horrible sounds” and had water in it that trickled out of his mouth as he slept. 12 The mask aggravated Abbott’s condition making it harder for him to sleep. This experience became the original impetus of his painting Remlack (c. 2004) (Fig. 2). Abbott exhibited Remlack, but was not satisfied with the painting and consequently made changes to the piece over a decade later, renaming the same canvas Remlack Too in 2015. 13 This process and the changes made through it become an essential part of understanding the later image. Remlack Too is representative of the

11 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author. Abbott’s painting Lazarus, which exemplifies his typical style, was part of the 32nd Annual Spiritual and Religious exhibition at the Springville Museum of Art in 2017. In Remlack Too, there is a ticket with the words “Kolob theater presents” on it. Abbott acknowledged that this is meant to refer to God’s dwelling place, but these religious references are exceptions to his oeuvre.
12 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
13 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author; “Abbott and Connell.”
combined surrealist and postmodernist style within which Abbott works, and is a large painting, 74.5” x 119.5”, thus demanding the viewer’s attention. A cursory glance of the painting may suggest that it is a fantastical picture of a horse at the edge of a bed, and an incomplete study may suggest it is about the artist’s struggle with sleep, but the piece is more complex than that. While the piece does address Abbott’s experience with sleep apnea, on a deeper level it is both a surrealist and postmodernist presentation of the artist’s approach on life.

In Remlack Too a large Chinese clay horse stands at the edge of a Renaissance-style four-poster canopy bed staring at a reproduction of Henry Fuseli’s The Nightmare (1790-1791) (Fig. 3) as if at its own reflection. The Chinese clay horse references the Terracotta Army sculptures buried with Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang and the bed is a reproduction of The Great Bed of Ware (1590) (Fig. 4). An indent in the bedding indicates that someone occupied the bed not long ago. A raven rests on the horse’s back, which is partially covered with nonsensical mathematical and physics-related formulas and constellations. A sett pavement (similar to cobblestone, but made up of smooth, rectangular blocks) underlies the scene, and it includes a manhole and a light-pole with a crosswalk sign. Rather than indicating whether crossing the street is allowed or prohibited, the signs reads “REM,” referring to the important period of deep sleep when one is most likely to dream. Behind the bed lies a sleep apnea device consisting of a fire bellows, modern computers, and an electrocardiogram. Next to the machine, near the foot of the bed, a chimpanzee sits looking up at the horse while holding a gold ring set with a black gem. Behind all of this, a sidewalk divides the space from a black abyss. In addition to each of these components, many objects lie strewn across the ground including: a drawing of DNA strands, a crushed soda can, a marble, two lilies, a tipped over wine glass, a shoelace like string beneath the horse’s front right leg, a ticket reading “Kolob Theater Presents,” a cellphone with earphones
connected, Sidewalk Surfer shoes, and an unplugged cord. While the general composition of the painting is consistent from *Remlack* to *Remlack Too*, there are several minor additions to the original canvas. Many of the scattered belongings on the ground distinguish *Remlack Too* from its previous image. In addition to these extra objects, Abbott made some adjustments to the decoration of previously existing objects within the painting.

Many elements of *Remlack Too* seem to imply that Abbott is overly troubled by his sleep apnea, but this is an incomplete understanding of the painting. Though the title of the painting, the street sign reading “REM,” and the sleep apnea machine are direct references to the artist’s condition, there are additional layers to the painting that should also be explored. While Abbott’s sleep apnea was the impetus for the painting, it does not constitute the final product. Sleep apnea is used more as a means to an end than the end itself. Abbott was bothered more by the supposed solution—a sleep apnea mask—than the declared condition itself. Abbott said, “I wasn’t aware that I wasn’t sleeping, but when I had the mask on, I was aware that I wasn’t getting any sleep,” finally, after “[having] a hard time taking it seriously,” he gave up on the mask.  

Abbott, plagued more by his sleep apnea mask than his actual condition, simply used his experience with sleep deprivation to fuel his creativity. Therefore, to look at *Remlack Too* only as a representation of the artist’s condition is to disregard the additional layers hidden further within it.

Another important element of *Remlack Too* is the time period in which it was created. Abbott hopes his works “breathe of this time.” The twenty-first century is a time of constant divide. American society has become increasingly polarized; rather than overcoming differences, they are often magnified in an Us vs. Them mentality. There are also rifts based on politics, race, 

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14 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
gender, religion, education, sexual orientation, age, social class, team rivalries, a pull between the traditional versus progressive, and more. However, as society has polarized many of these demographics, academics and artists have recognized a need for diverse representation. Helen Kwon acknowledged that “The efforts [of postmodernism…] retrieve lost differences, or…curtail the waning of them.\(^{15}\) Postmodern artists seek to add a variety of voices to the story of history. They acknowledge and celebrate differences and representation from all angles—not just in extreme opposites, but in everything in between. These issues are not all about an either/or. Abbott visually depicts what contemporary theorists have explored through text. He realizes the need for wider representation, the need to hear different perspectives, and he paints that in *Remlack Too*.

From *Remlack to Remlack Too*, Abbott deliberately altered his painting so that it would include more variety. He declared:

I wanted it to have more about things from ancient periods and the development or movement of time that it didn’t have in the other one….I changed it to be more about the universe….I think I made it more elegant in areas and more grungy in other area, so it kind of had this balance between beautiful and luxurious and this kind of guttery contrast.\(^{16}\)

His inclusion of both halves of binary pairs in *Remlack Too* proves his desire for more widespread representation. Occasionally, he even fills in some points along the spectrum to indicate the need for a range of ideas and types of people, rather than encouraging only extremes. Through binary pairs found in this painting, Abbott advocates for an understanding of both sides of an argument, or for a more universal perspective.


\(^{16}\) Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
The use of binary pairs is something Abbott employs from both postmodern and surrealist art. Though *Remlack Too* is based on a particular personal experience, and though Abbott is not aware of particular artists in the broader field painting in a style similar to his own, there is a larger scope of artists working in the same artistic vein as he is. Abbott is one in a history of artists that have recycled surrealist concepts. More particularly, he is not the only artist working within either surrealism or postmodernism and using elements of the other, even if he is unaware of the others doing the same thing. These two practices are not a random combination that artists have arbitrarily experimented with. Rather, there are elements at the core of each of them that allow them to become seamlessly unified.

**Surrealism and Postmodernism**

It is true that Abbott’s style does incorporate some elements of surrealism, but this must be understood in his contemporary context. Surrealism is a style that originated nearly a century before Abbott’s *Remlack Too*, but it has continued through the decades in various forms and various locations. Surrealism as a movement was officially born in 1924 in France when Andre Breton published the first “Manifesto of Surrealism.” Joining at different times, Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte, Max Ernst, Joan Miro, and Andre Masson were of the early Surrealists. Breton “loathed” the concept of positivism, the notion that everything can be rationally explained through science, because he found it ridiculous and “hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement.”  

Breton and other Surrealists relied on Freudian psychoanalysis not only in terms of dreams and consciousness, but also in sexuality and violence. In his first manifesto, he balked at the notion that dreams are seen as “inferior” to waking reality. He wrote, “I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams.”

Dreams are what Breton and the Surrealists explored, even favored. Surrealism became a study of “psychic automatism in its pure state,” or a study of dreams versus wakefulness, and the irrationality versus rationality both in dreams and in the hallucinatory state that comes from a lack of sleep.

The Surrealists valued a state of being that had been previously overlooked. Some Surrealists worked in a strand of Biomorphic Surrealism, or automatism, and others through Veristic Surrealism. Automatists relied on the subconscious to create random amoebic-like forms, like in Joan Miro’s *Painting* (1933) (Fig. 5). Veristic Surrealists utilized more recognizable images, but relied on strange juxtapositions, distorted images, and bizarre scale, and disjointed contexts. An example of this is in Rene Magritte’s *Le viol* (The Rape) (1934) (Fig. 6) in which a limbless female nude becomes the face of an androgynous figure. Here, Magritte explored Freudian notions of sexuality and violence through a jarring juxtaposition. Abbott’s pieces are more aligned with the strange juxtapositions and disjointed contexts of veristic surrealism.

In his first manifesto, Breton gave an encyclopedic entry for Surrealism. He wrote:

“Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the

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18 Ibid., 11.
19 Ibid., 26.
principal problems of life.” Artists have explored moments of wakefulness, consciousness, and of reality for millennia, but the Surrealists focused on what had been overlooked and undervalued for so long. To experience this “superior reality,” Surrealists like Miro and Masson would intentionally deprive themselves of sleep for extended periods of time. This would allow them to experiment with dreams and hallucinations, and to do so in a more self-aware and controlled manner. Max Ernst’s Two Children are Threatened by a Nightingale (1924) and Salvador Dali’s Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee Around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening (1944) both rely on dreams and dream imagery. These are ideas that the Surrealists not only thought about and discussed, but that appear in their art and ideas that appear in Remlack Too.

Though the movement originated in France, it made its way around Europe and to America to where some Surrealists like Dali and Yves Tanguy moved. The height of Surrealism lasted through the 1930s, but its end is debated. Some say the official movement ended around the time of World War II when the group first dissolved, and some say it ended with Breton’s death in 1966. Though Surrealism was relatively short-lived, even before ending, it began influencing other movements. However, Surrealism’s off-shoots and post-war manifestations are not and should not be mistaken as identical mirrorings of the original movement. Some scholars have distinguished between the two by using the term “neosurrealism” to discuss contemporary

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20 Ibid.
21 The Victory Stele of Naram-Sin from ancient Mesopotamia, the Palette of King Narmer from ancient Egypt, and the Harvester’s Vase from the prehistoric Aegean are a few examples of centuries-old art depicting moments from reality as experienced in a wakeful state.
surrealism, or by using the term “pansurrealism” to ensure encompassing all surrealisms.\footnote{John Richardson, \textit{An eye for music: Popular music and the audiovisual surreal} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 32; Terrance Lindall, “What’s New in the Surreal World,” \textit{Art & Antiques} 29, no. 3 (2006): 168-172.} Overall, scholars differentiate the two by using “Surrealism” to refer to the original movement and artists, and “surrealism” to refer to the ideas that have remained through the decades.\footnote{Marc J. LaFountain, \textit{Dali and Postmodernism: This is not an essence} (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 7.} This thesis will also distinguish between Surrealism and surrealism accordingly. Whichever term used, each artist or group of artists that have associated themselves with surrealism have in some way adopted aspects of the initial phase, but have also deliberately cast aside other seemingly foundational elements of it.

Examples of this partial adoption of Surrealism include CoBrA, a mid-twentieth-century European movement highly influenced by Surrealism, but rejected “the Surrealists’ emphasis on psychology;” or Arshile Gorky whose amoebic forms from Biomorphic Surrealism became an early development of Abstract Expressionism; or the artists in the Chicago-based “Surrealist Movement” beginning in the 1960s whose “relaxed attitude toward sexual identity” would have bothered Breton because for Breton, sexuality was a fundamental component of Surrealism. The Postsurrealists in Southern California in the 1930s and 1940s “distinguished themselves from the European Surrealists by their rejection of the irrational…”\footnote{Hopkins, \textit{A Companion to Dada and Surrealism}, 422; Isabelle Dervaux, et al, \textit{Surrealism USA} (New York: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2004), 15, 43.} Mid-century New York artist Paul Thek termed his style “social surrealist” because he found his “source in commercial reality rather than the individual psyche.”\footnote{Dervaux, et al, \textit{Surrealism USA}, 69.} He clearly associated himself with a strain of Surrealism, but simultaneously distanced himself from it because he was not interested in dream worlds, and
like other artists, “offered a more detached and reserved take on Freudian fetishism and sexuality.”

These and other American and European artists both borrowed from and distanced themselves from Andre Breton’s Surrealism. Perhaps this is why Krzysztof Fijalkowski stated that surrealism is “above all a ‘movement’—not only in the sense of being an association but also because it is constantly ‘in movement,’ shifting its ground to meet different demands and never settling in one place.” This malleability is how surrealism survives after Surrealism dies.

Postmodern artists also often turn back to the influences of Surrealism in their work. For example, Cui Xiwen’s Angel series is closely related with Surrealism through its use of dream imagery (Angel No. 13) (2006) (Fig. 7). This is an element of Remlack Too that Abbott relies on heavily. M. Louise Stanley, another postmodern artist associated with surrealism, graduated with both her BFA and MFA from the California College of Arts and Crafts, where Abbott received his degrees. She earned her MFA in 1969, the year before Abbott earned his BFA. Her Homage to Magritte (2014) (Fig. 8) features an extended hand holding a check with the words “the check is in the mail” beneath it as a reference to Magritte’s The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe) (1929) (Fig. 9). Each of these artists whose works have been exhibited at and purchased by major institutions borrow certain aspects of Surrealism throughout their work. This indicates that this tradition within which Abbott works is not sporadic or inconsequential, but a significant pattern.

28 Ibid., 66, 69
29 Hopkins, A Companion to Dada and Surrealism, 419-410, 440; Dervaux, et al, Surrealism USA, 72-73.
Just as many other artists and movements have done, Abbott, too, incorporates surrealist aspects while setting aside others. He borrows Surrealism’s ideas of dreams, rationality and irrationality, logic and lack of logic, conscious and subconscious thoughts, and a style with includes strange juxtapositions. However, Abbott is not interested in the explicit fetishization so often associated with the Surrealists. The branch of surrealism whose ideas Abbott most closely aligns with is that of the Postsurrealists, a small group of artists working in California in the 1930s. As Susan Ehrlich explained, “Postsurrealism…affirms all that surrealism negates: impeccable aesthetic order rather than chaotic confusion, conscious rather than unconscious manipulation of materials, [and] the exploration of the normal functionings of the mind.”

Where Surrealism leaves the psychic process unorganized, Postsurrealism imposes order; where the former utilizes dream logic and imagery drawn from the unconscious mind, the latter is based on “conscious rational associations.” Abbott does both within Remlack Too by relying on experiences with sleep deprivation, but seeking to organize it in a rational way. Additionally, the Postsurrealists did not concentrate on violence, sex, or death and the fears and desires associated with them in a Freudian way. In fact, Postsurrealist founder Lorser Feitelson disdained the eroticism of Surrealism. Abbott, who is less interested in the overt eroticism, operates under a similar repurposed surrealism.

Though surrealism has clearly never fully gone away, there appears to be something that particularly attracts postmodernist artists to the former. While scholars have addressed aspects of the relationship between Surrealism and Postmodernism, there is room for more research on the

33 Dervaux, et al, Surrealism USA, 38.
34 Ibid., 40.
35 Ibid.
relationship between surrealism and postmodernism as a whole. For example, David Hopkins lists multiple scholarly texts that address post-war surrealism, though they focus more on mid-twentieth century surrealisms than on surrealism within Postmodernism. Fields other than art history have explored the relationship between the two. Scholar Marc J. LaFountain explored the ways in which Salvador Dali’s *Endless Enigma* (1938) (Fig. 10) may have anticipated postmodernism. LaFountain argued that the humor, ambiguity, and deferring in the painting, combined with the knowledge that postmodernism is a rewriting of the past, are what ties it to the latter movement. Even though scholars and artists all over have acknowledged that surrealism and postmodernism *do* go together, many art historians only address one or two ways in which they do. These movements do not just happen to have similarities; rather, they are connected at their cores.

Jean-Francois Lyotard’s definition of Postmodernism succinctly states how surrealism works well within postmodernity. He wrote, “Postmodernity is not a new age, it is the rewriting of some features modernity had tried or pretended to gain …” Rather than trying to be something new, postmodernism combines elements from the past that it hopes to recycle, it borrows from Surrealism and repurposes those elements. The question therefore, is not *why* does

36 David Hopkins, *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*.
38 LaFountain, *Dali and Postmodernism*.
surrealism work well within Postmodernism, for it is one of many modernisms appropriated within the latter period. Instead, the question becomes which—or how—aspects of surrealism align with postmodernism?

Postmodernism and surrealism also work well together because of their style—or lack thereof. Postmodernism does not necessarily have a “look” that defines it as do many of the other periods throughout art history. Instead, it is defined by concepts. Though surrealism is more concrete than postmodernism in subject and style, there is still a great deal of variety within surrealism. Even Veristic Surrealism, the strand that more closely mimics reality and to which Abbott is more closely connected, varies in style from one artist to the next. As Fijalkowski explains, “Surrealism is a total activity which cannot be confined within traditional frameworks.”40 This lack of a style helps surrealism and Postmodernism work well with each other. Additionally, this lack of style allows room for a variety of artists and styles to fit within its bounds. Abbott is one such artist.

Similar to the fluidity of surrealist and postmodernist styles, each of these terms are flexible in definition. As demonstrated by its many arrangements, “surrealism is not one thing, and there are as many manifestations of it as there are surrealists,” or as Fijalkowski explained, “The nature of surrealism is protean and it is impossible to give a simple definition of its precise nature.”41 Postmodernism, too, is marked by eclecticism and the difficulty of defining it. Artists working within each of these traditions hand-pick the characteristics of each that they hope to

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employ. These ambiguities allow surrealism and postmodernism to work seamlessly with one another.

Postmodernism and surrealism also overlap in concepts. Language is important both to the surrealist and the postmodernist. The Surrealists were especially interested in Lacanian psychoanalysis in which Lacan outlines stages of development in the psyche. For Lacan, the final stage, or the Symbolic Order, is when a child begins learning language. He further argues that language is like the unconscious in that they both search for what is lacking (language lacks union with the mother, which the child previously experienced, and unconsciousness is lacking in awareness). Postmodern artist Mary Kelly relies on Lacan’s stages in her installation *Post-Partum Document* (1973) (Fig. 11) where she chronicles the first years of her son’s life accordingly.

Postmodernists and surrealists alike are interested in semiotics, a specific study of words. Semioticians break down the complexities of words, their stream of meanings, arbitrary nature, and more. Rene Magritte’s *The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe)* relies on semiotics in the use of words within the piece to make it clear that the painting is not a pipe; rather, it is a painting of a pipe. Similarly, postmodern artists like Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, and Jenny Holzer rely on words as fundamental components of their pieces. Though Abbott rarely uses words within his paintings, his carefully crafted titles often reveal important information about his works. *Remlack*, of course, is a made-up word describing a lack of REM,

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44 Joseph Kosuth’s *One and Three Chairs* (1965) is a clear reference to semiotics; Barbara Kruger’s *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (1989) uses her iconic white text on red; the LED texts of Jenny Holzer read like a marquis, as in *Guggenheim* (1989).
as is signaled by a signpost in the painting. For Abbott, titles are not merely a verbal explanation of the work, but a deliberate choice to incorporate the complexities of language into his pieces.

Surrealists and Postmodernists are also alike in their distrust of science. Breton especially disliked the notion that science could rationally explain everything. Postmodernism also questions previous ways of thinking in what is said, how it is said, and who tells it. As cultural critic Hal Foster argues, “postmodernism is not just an artistic style but a condition of life in a media-saturated global village…It constitutes a major challenge to ways of thinking about the world that have their origin in Enlightenment theories of rationality and progress.”

Each of these groups move away from the concrete explanations provided by hard science. Abbott, too, is a little wary of the solutions presented by science and technology. Abbott’s sleep apnea machine caused more problems for him than it solved. Thus, he struggled trusting the doctors that prescribed him the machine. This distrust in science was a greater influence on Remlack Too than the artist’s actual sleep apnea.

Another characteristic of postmodernism is that it parodies and appropriates other movements. Modernism sought to reject the art historical past, and postmodernism is a turning away from that modernist attitude. This means postmodernism readily borrows elements of surrealism and adopts them as their own characteristics. Similarly, “the Surrealists maintained that anyone can be a surrealist,” thus allowing itself to be repurposed. Furthermore, surrealism takes no issue with being adopted because it too is an “amalgamation of knowledge, imagination,

46 LaFountain, *Dali and Postmodernism*, 50.
and politics,” which is what Steven Harris argues makes it timeless. Each of these movements are so mutable that they overlap with multiple points of contact.

Abbott’s works are full of art historical references, but he most directly references the Surrealists in his *Exquisite Corpse* series. Exquisite Corpse refers to a parlor game that many Surrealists participated in. The game consisted of drawing part of an image, folding the paper back to hide the drawing, and passing it to the next person to draw the next section, and so on. Abbott’s *Exquisite Corpse with Ermine* (c. 2004-2005) (Fig. 12) and *Exquisite Albrecht* (2004-2005) (Fig. 13). Feature section of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Lady with Ermine* (1489-1490) (Fig. 14) and Albrecht Durer’s *Self-Portrait* (1500) (Fig. 15), respectively. These explicit parodies are examples of relying on surrealist practices in postmodern art. However, rather than relying on an automatist process that the Surrealists employed, Abbott’s exquisite corpse process is controlled. Abbott adopts a surrealist idea of the exquisite corpse, but in a truly postmodern manner. His corpse sections appropriate pieces from art history, rather than relying on the automatist process of surrealism.

Postmodernism also incorporates several theoretical approaches, including psychoanalysis. This congruency has been explored more through the field of psychology than through art history. Roger Horrocks explains that Freud anticipates deconstructionism, one of the approaches employed in postmodernism, and lists a few ways in which Freudian psychology coincides with postmodern thought. These include “the critique of moral schemes, the fragmentation of the self, [and] the impossibility of knowing the objective truth or an objective past.” Michael Duncan explains that “Contemporary artists…continue to mine subject matter

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49 Horrocks, *Freud Revisisted*, 178.
seemingly wrested from the subconscious, expressing themes similar to those of the classic Surrealists.”

These similarities each allow for an effortless connection between surrealism and postmodernism.

Abbott and Postmodernism

There are also aspects of postmodernism tied less to surrealism that are still important components of Abbott’s art. Staker, Alder, and others have already noted surrealist elements in Abbott’s work, yet the postmodern aspects of his art have been overlooked. The tools and ideas he uses in his art are certainly related to other postmodern artists. Postmodernism is a grab bag of ideas, so to speak—postmodern artists use whichever tools they choose, and are fine to set the others aside. Some elements of postmodernism include pastiche, fantasy and playfulness, and even ambiguity. In addition to these, postmodern art is often self-reflexive. Finally, postmodernism disposes of hierarchies, or strives to more widely distribute representation: “[P]ostmodernism is often associated with pluralistic thought—the idea that that there’s no single correct way of seeing the world.” Postmodernism was born in an age when different demographics fought louder than ever before to make their voices heard. Each of these postmodern characteristics are at play in Abbott’s work. However, this last aspect—that postmodernism gives equal weight to different voices—will be particularly important in reading Remlack Too.

50 Dervaux, et al, Surrealism USA, 46.
51 d’alleva, Methods and Theories, 144; Stiles and Selz, Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, 808.
52 Wheale, The Postmodern Arts, 42
53 d’alleva Methods and Theories, 146.
A strong characteristic of postmodern art is that it is a pastiche of historical pieces. In addition to parodying Surrealism, postmodernism draws upon any period of art for influence. By relying on canonical works, postmodern artists borrow ideas associated with the original piece. For example, Sandow Birk appropriates Jacques-Louis David’s *Death of Marat* (1793) (Fig. 16) in his own *Death of Manuel* (1992) (Fig. 17). Birk links the Latino subject of his painting to the heroicized victim of David’s piece; his is a commentary on race. Abbott also references different artists, works, and movements in many of his pieces. For example, the artist’s *Sacred Cows* series directly references an artist in each work: *Sacred Cows of Art History: At End of Innocence: Homage to Kurt Schwitter* (1986) (Fig. 18) refers to Dada artist Kurt Schwitter, and *Sacred Cows of Art History: A Recital for Henri* (c. 1986) (Fig. 19) features Henri Matisse’s *Dance* (1910) (Fig. 20) superimposed on the side of a cow. Abbott selected the artists for this series based on his favorite painters.54 *Remlack Too* repurposes Henry Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* as a sort of visual pun, as Abbott explained.55 These references not only exist, but are meant to be picked up on. Many of these influences are literally seen in the image, but also reflected in the title.

Another aspect of postmodern art is that it is often silly or humorous. This is not to say that they are trivial or lack meaning, but that they are playful. Artists often use playful images to exploit deeper issues. Duane Hanson’s hyperrealist figures like *Tourists* (1970) (Fig. 21) are playful sculptures. They are often placed in a gallery in a way that patrons may mistake them as being real people. These works, though fun, pose important questions about consumerism and reality. One catalog highlighted the playful and fantastical works of art created by artists with

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54 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
55 Ibid.
ties to Utah, including Abbott. In the catalog for the exhibition, director Vern Swanson wrote of Abbott’s whimsical works, “Perhaps the most humorous and satirical artist in Utah today is Gregory Abbott. His ‘Sacred Cows of Art History’ series pokes fun, in a serious manner, at the masterpieces of world art. The intricacy, design and overlaying of symbolic surface, requires meditative examination. Visual puns, art historical references and autobiographical inclusions make his work fascinating and perplexing at the same time.”

56 More Beautiful (2017) (Fig. 22) depicts a woman dressed up hiding her face in a cow mask. It is ambiguous as to what purpose the mask fulfills, and as to whom she tries to impress. It plays on questions of ideal beauty and who determines what that is. In Pirouette (2000) (Fig. 23), a bulky grand piano, rather than a trained graceful ballerina, twirls in the air above a set of stairs. The viewer knows that instead of landing lightly, the piano can only crash on the ground and tumble down the stairs. The elegance of the grand piano and of a ballerina’s pirouette are contrasted by the painted particle board frame as well as the knowledge of the piano’s immediate fate. Remlack Too is a play on words, includes the visual pun of The Nightmare, and is a deliberately fantastical scene. These works, and many of Abbott’s other works, are examples of postmodernism being intentionally implausible and silly.

Abbott’s works, however, are not simply jokes, but sophisticated explorations of significant issues. The humor and impossibility of an image encourages the viewer to ask questions and dig deeper. Abbott stated:

Humor and whimsy help mask pain and tragedy, the dark, and the uncomfortable places in our lives…. Humor and whimsy often are my invitation for the discovery of the serious and uninviting world. It is while making humorous the journey and moving forward with

levity of brush strokes, pigment, and collage fragments, and focusing on what lies beneath, that the true theme can be revealed.57

Abbott’s painting *More Beautiful* is an example of this: it is playful and fantastic on the surface, but it also raises deeper questions about beauty and who determines it, and common insecurities.58 As exemplified with *Remlack Too*, and will be further explored below, Abbott uses fantastical images and implausible scenery to explore more complicated ideas.

Finally, postmodernism is often self-reflexive.59 An example of this self-reflexiveness is apparent in Adrian Piper’s *Calling Cards* (1986) (Fig. 24). In these cards, she condemns the racism she has personally experienced as a woman of African descent. *Remlack Too* also demonstrates a self-reflexiveness. The idea for *Remlack*, and later *Remlack Too* came from Abbott’s personal experience with a lack of REM caused by his sleep apnea and, more specifically, caused by his sleep apnea machine.

Analyzing Abbott’s work in a postmodern framework is helpful in deciphering the messages found in his paintings. Despite their whimsical and playful attitude, his paintings are current, they are relevant and self-reflexive, and they do not shy away from contemporary issues. This need for widespread representation in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries is depicted in the representation of binary pairs in Abbott’s *Remlack Too*. Abbott hopes to pull out meaning and discover serious thoughts. His works, therefore, are not intended to be taken at only face value.

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57 Gregory Abbott to Emily Larsen Boothe, July 2017.
58 Ibid.
59 Hopkins, *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, 411,
Binary Pairs and *Remlack Too*

An aspect shared by surrealism and postmodernism that is important in reading *Remlack Too* is that of binary pairs. The idea of binary pairs is found in Structuralism and is the notion of comprehending by opposites. After discussing the basics of binary pairs and how they work within postmodernism and surrealism, this thesis will then examine some of the binary pairs within Abbott’s painting. The balance among and wide representation throughout his pairings reflects the artist’s personal views.

Binary pairs are evident in surrealist dichotomies and a significant aspect of structuralist theory, which postmodernists explore. Structuralists seek to find structure in society—these structures are not natural, but established by humans to help them cope with the world and make more sense of the objects, ideas, events, and sounds around them.60 Like any methodological approach, there are many aspects of this theory, but one fundamental component is that of binary oppositions. According to Saussure and other structuralists, “our ability to identify an entity (such as an object, a concept, or a sound) is based on the difference [one] perceive[s] between it and all other entities…the human mind perceives differences most readily in terms of opposites, which structuralists call binary opposition: two ideas, directly opposed, each of which [one] understand[s] by means of its opposition to the other.”61 Saussure calls this *différance*, a combination of “to defer” and “to differ” because meaning is found in a combination of each. For example, as Lois Tyson explains, red only means something because it is different from blue, green, yellow, or any other color.62 Otherwise, there would be no need for the word red. Even

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61 Ibid., 213.
62 Ibid.
books for children teach binary oppositions: big/small, tall/short, up/down, heavy/light, hot/cold, etc. The human mind learns what something is by what it is not, or by how it relates to another idea. In a true amalgamation of surrealism and postmodernism, Abbott relies on several binary pairs in *Remlack Too* to convey his meanings.

Though some figures like deconstructionist Jacques Derrida posits that all binary pairs are hierarchical and that “one term in the pair is always privileged, or considered superior to the other,” structuralists do not make this claim.\(^{63}\) Furthermore, postmodern theory aligns more with the structuralist viewpoint in this case—it is not concerned with one being favored over the other. In “Mapping the Postmodern,” Andreas Huyssen explains, “[postmodernity] operates in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first.”\(^{64}\) Postmodernism questions the hierarchies of binary pairs and is content not privileging one over the other. Surrealism also works with binary pairs—it does this through exploring rationality versus irrationality and consciousness versus unconsciousness.

*Remlack Too* deals with a variety of dichotomies, or binary pairs. In alignment with postmodernism and Saussurean principles of structuralism, Abbott’s painting is replete with binary oppositions. In a world of increasing antagonism towards one part of a binary pair—though different people may favor opposing halves of the binary pair—Abbott calmly seeks for a balance of both. The binaries Abbott implements in *Remlack Too* include life and death, erotic and unerotic, luxuriousness and common, logic and irrationality, the states of sleep and wakefulness, Eastern and Western influences, ancient and modern, and satisfaction and a lack of

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 254

fulfillment. Of the binaries Abbott deals with, some rely on surrealist concepts more heavily, and others appear to be a more direct response to conversations in postmodernism. This thesis will explore the contrast between life and death, sleep and wake with its resulting logic and irrationality.

Examining Remlack Too in terms of these binary pairs reveals how the painting explores deeper contemporary issues. Abbott is not formulaic in balancing his binaries. For some they may cover an approximate equal area of the canvas, and for some they are somewhat balanced in the number of objects on either side of the binary. However, he focuses less on systematically balancing out binary pairs, and more on representing both in a balanced way. Abbott himself mentioned that he changed certain aspects between Remlack and Remlack Too specifically to have both sides of a binary pair more equally represented, or to have a balance between them.65 There are also instances in which Abbott fills in the gaps between two binaries. This proves that Abbott seeks not only for extremes, but for a range of representation. Filling in the gaps between binaries creates a variety of perspectives.

One of the most notable contrasts in Abbott’s Remlack Too is between life and death. This binary relates to tendencies of the Surrealists who often played with the themes of life and death in their works, even fusing the distinction between the two.66 This is also an opposition that Abbott and others with sleep apnea experience nightly. Abbott explained the repeated experience of those with sleep apnea saying, “Each night the patient stops breathing a hundred

65 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
66 Rosalind E. Krauss, Jane Livingston, and Dawn Ades, L'amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism (Washington: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), 206. See Frida Kahlo’s The Two Fridas (1939). Though she did not consider herself a Surrealist, Breton did, and her works are often surrealist.
times, a hundred mini deaths.”  

He fluctuates between living and dying on a nightly basis. The symbols of life in *Remlack Too* include the image of DNA strands resting against the light-post, as well as the monitors that are part of this sleep apnea machine, whose varied and unsteady lines of the EKG read the living activity of the heart. The fire bellows that are also part of the sleep apnea machine are also used to sustain life—typically the life of the fire, but in this case, it is a different kind of life. One subtle, yet direct reference to life is the small raffle-looking ticket on the ground near the horse’s front legs, the phone, and the foot of the bed. According to Abbot, the ticket that reads “Kolob Theater Presents” is a reference to the creation of life. He explained, indicating his religious beliefs, the ticket denotes “The place where God dwells. For me it was creation—it was God creating us all.”  

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the church to which Abbott belongs, believe that Kolob is the star nearest to the dwelling place of God. Even the easily overlooked ticket is a reference to life and its beginnings. These symbols of life are scattered across the entire painting and not meant to be hidden.

In balancing this first binary relationship, *Remlack Too* likewise employs symbols of death, both historical and modern. The most traditional of these *memento mori* symbols are the empty and tipped over wine glass, as well as the lilies disconnected from their roots that will inevitably soon die. In addition to these, Abbott uses modern devices to relay the same ideas. The unplugged cord, presumably connected to the sleep apnea machine, fails to sustain life, and the screen on the cellphone displays a timer that has run out of time (“00:00”). In past centuries,

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67 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
68 Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
69 *The Pearl of Great Price: A Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narrations of Joseph Smith, First Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), 34.
an hourglass would fulfill the same purpose, but here, Abbott creates updated *vanitas* symbols.\(^{70}\) The manhole in the street can serve as an entrance to the underworld, a world that is accessed upon death. Lastly, the raven looking directly at the viewer while resting on the horse’s back is also a symbol of death. Though small, the raven’s gaze is striking. The symbols of death appear in this painting as much as the symbols of life do, creating a balance between the two. In this binary pair, Abbott relies on his art historical background in a truly postmodern fashion. The symbols and concepts he draws on are repurposed from previous eras. Additionally, they represent a binary pair often found within surrealist works. Abbott does not favor life or death over the other, but balances out their representation, thus proving his need for balance in life.

Abbott deals with the oppositions of sleep and a state of wakefulness as well, but for him, the distinction is not perfectly clear. The purpose of the large bed is for someone to sleep on, and *The Nightmare* is included because it addresses a kind of sleep. The “REM” illuminated on the street post refer to the most important part of the sleep cycle. More importantly, the sleep apnea machine exists to help the user sleep. On the other hand, however, the sleep apnea machine exists *because* the user cannot sleep. Furthermore, in this case, the user’s ability to sleep was actually inhibited because of the sleep apnea apparatus.\(^{71}\) This object used to aid in sleeping comes to represent wakefulness. Though the lady in Fuseli’s painting rests, the animals in Abbott’s painting are all very much awake. Next, the empty bed indicates that its owner is *not* asleep on it. Finally, the painting’s title refers to the *lack* of REM sleep, which lack prevents an individual from feeling completely rested. The painting seems to vacillate between each half of

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\(^{70}\) Dutch *vanitas* paintings, especially still lifes, use certain objects placed next to skulls as reminders that life is only temporary. Examples include *Violin and Glass Ball* by Pieter Claesz (with a pocket-watch and a tipped over goblet), and *Vanitas Still Life* by Maria van Oostierwijck (with an hourglass and flowers that will soon begin to wilt).

\(^{71}\) Gregory Abbott, interview by the author.
this binary pair, just as the artist alternates between these two states throughout the night. Abbott’s own experience with sleep apnea is much like the sleep deprivation exercises original Surrealists like Miro and Masson practiced. However, unlike the Surrealists who intentionally forced themselves into this state, Abbott’s is not self-induced.

Part of the result of the contrast between sleep and wake is the contrast between logic and irrationality. Abbott had this idea of logic and irrationality in mind when Remlack became Remlack Too—he is interested in the logic that exists in dreams that becomes irrational upon waking up, thus balancing not only sleep and wake, but logic and irrationality. Speaking of the equations on the horse’s legs, Abbott described, “It came to represent more how in our dreams we seem to solve all the problems of the universe and it seems so logical to us […] why didn’t anybody ever think of this? And then you wake up and you have kind of a lingering taste of what you were dreaming, but it makes absolutely no sense. And you can’t figure out why it was so real, and now it is so wrong.” Typically, dreams are viewed as illogical, and consciousness as more logical. However, as Abbott stated, his dreams are logical, and only became illogical when he wakes up. While speaking about Remlack Too and in regards to those that have sleep apnea, Abbott wrote, “In these brief separations of body and soul [when the patient stops breathing,] he is able to examine the intricacies, the theorems, the mathematics and the logic of the universe…. These periods are fluctuations between the conscious and the subconscious. The patient strives to organize these irrational moments in order to make sense of reality, as evident in the formulas drawn on the horse’s side and legs. However, these equations also vacillate between rationality and irrationality. As written on the horse, they do not solve any

72 Ibid.
73 Gregory Abbott to Emily Larsen Boothe.
problems, but they are recognizable enough to scholars of math and sciences as pertaining to physics and astronomy. The balance between logic and irrationality is intertwined with and corresponds with the balance between sleep and wake.

The painting exhibits tools of logic and of science to create a scene of confusion. The series of computers and machines by the side of the bed imply an understanding—they are a means to both gaining and reporting information. The constellations and equation found on the horse also represent methods of finding truth, or knowing something logically. Even the DNA strands indicate the ability to know something through reason. However, even with this variety of tools, the painting is irrational. The arbitrary objects spread across the ground are irrationally placed, and the strange juxtaposition of a horse at the edge of the bed placed on the street seems irrational. The contraption of computers and technology aside the bed, though it should aid in gaining understanding, is strewn about as though it is impossible to know anything from reading their screens. This fallibility of technology and science is found in both surrealism and postmodernism. These polar opposite ideas rely on each other in the painting—Abbott presents tools that assist in logic and a scene that lacks logic as a whole.

Each of Abbott’s binary pairs fulfills a specific purpose. Some of them exist as elements of surrealism within Remlack Too, some are depiction of tensions found within postmodernism, and some reflect attitudes of both. As a whole, they represent an array of voices, or widespread representation. Fulfillment is attained through valuing different perspectives, and a lack of satisfaction is the result of ignoring them.

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74 Grant Hart, interview by the author, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, November 10, 2017.
Conclusion

Ultimately, Abbott encourages seeking out different voices and different perspectives. Just as he was open-minded with color choice in preschool and his parents were open-minded with his artistic training, he is also open-minded today to the opinions and viewpoints of others, and his work reflects that attitude. This thesis proves that while on one level *Remlack Too* addresses Abbott’s personal experience with sleep apnea and frustrations with his sleep apnea machine, on a deeper level, it reveals his efforts to embrace diversity. Contrary to the increased polarization of American society, Abbott values a variety of perspectives and opinions.

As this thesis explores through *Remlack Too*, Abbott’s work, though previously overlooked in academia, is representative of a more global trend in which a repurposed surrealism and postmodernism cohesively appear. He is like many other artists that have borrowed some elements of surrealism while discarding others, thus his art should be understood as a variation of surrealism. By looking not only at the surrealist influences on Abbott’s working, but at the postmodern influences as well, it is evident that he deserves more scholarly attention than he has previously received. It is apparent that he is in tune with a much larger tradition than that of Southern Utah art and makes similar connections between surrealism and postmodernism that reputable artists around the world have also embraced.

The lack of style, fluidity in definition, incorporation of semiotics, distrust in science, reliance on psychoanalysis, and postmodernism’s appropriating of earlier artistic movements all allow surrealism to work well within postmodernism. Understanding both the surrealist and postmodern elements of Abbott’s work reveal the deeper layers of understanding in his painting *Remlack Too*. They make way for studying the binary pairs found within the painting; these binary pairs indicate not only many concepts found in surrealism and postmodernism, but a
diversity of voices and opinion. Of the several binary pairs evident in *Remlack Too*, looking more closely at those of life and death, sleep and wake, and the resulting logical and irrational dichotomies in particular demonstrates the synthesizing of surrealism and postmodernism. Through Abbott’s rich amalgamation of artistic styles, he also reveals his proposal for how to approach living in a polarized society. He suggests being open-minded and embracing different points of view.
Figure 1 Gregory Abbott, *Remlack Too*, 2015
Figure 2 Gregory Abbott, (Original) *Remlack*, c. 2004 (painted over)
Figure 3 Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1790-1791
Figure 4 Hans Vredeman de Vries, The Great Bed of Ware, 1590
Figure 5 Joan Miro, *Painting*, 1933
Figure 6 Rene Magritte, *Le Viol* (The Rape), 1934
Figure 7 Cui Xiuwen, *Angel no. 13*, 2006
Figure 8 M. Louise Stanley, *Homage to Magritte*, 2014
Figure 9 Rene Magritte, The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe), 1929
Figure 10 Salvador Dali, *Endless Enigma*, 1938
Figure 11 Mary Kelley, *Post-Partum Document*, 1973
Figure 12 Gregory Abbott, *Exquisite Corpse with Ermine*, c. 2004-2005
Figure 13 Gregory Abbott, *Exquisite Albrecht*, c. 2004-2005
Figure 14 Leonardo da Vinci, *Lady with an Ermine*, 1489-1490
Figure 15 Albrecht Durer, *Self-Portrait*, 1500
Figure 16 Jacques-Louis David, *Death of Marat*, 1793
Figure 17 Sandow Birk, *Death of Manuel*, 1992
Figure 18 Gregory Abbott, Sacred Cows of Art History: at End of Innocence: Homage to Kurt Schwitter, 1986
Figure 19 Gregory Abbott, Sacred Cows of Art History: A Recital for Henri, c. 1986
Figure 20 Henri Matisse, *Dance*, 1910
Figure 21 Duane Hanson, *Tourists*, 1970
Figure 22 Gregory Abbott, *More beautiful*, 2017
Figure 23 Gregory Abbott, *Pirouette*, 2000
Dear Friend,

I am black.

I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.

I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.
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