Thaddeus Strode’s paintings can provide a wildly immersive experience. When we look at his varied works of applying paint, for his inventive use of mediums, and his imaginative ideas, we might get lost in a whirl of images that never seem complete. At the same time, Strode’s paintings guide the imagination and provide a jumping off point from which we can create our own imaginative tales.

Through this free-from creative writing activity you experience Strode’s paintings in a deliberately multisensory manner—spending some time with a single work in the exhibition and then fully exploring the imaginative consequences before us.

Free-form Writing Activity

1. After taking a walk through the exhibition, select one work that specifically interests or challenges you. Write the title of the painting in the space below.

2. Spend several minutes looking at your chosen painting in the space below. Try to write down at least 5 words or phrases that pertain to each category—all pulled from your experience with this single painting. Be as creative as possible, writing down descriptive adjectives, images, or even a name for one of the characters in the painting.

3. Continue to look at the painting, then write down at least 5 words or phrases that suggest motion or action in the work.

4. With your lists of words in front of you, circle the words that seem most relevant to the work. Below are 3 categories of possible words that you might circle:

   - Colors & Textures
   - Sounds & Noises
   - Shapes & Structures

5. With your new group of circled words, start to write a freewrite poem or story about this painting. Don’t worry if it’s not perfect or if it doesn’t make sense. Try to be as inventive as possible, collaging your words together in different and creative ways—echoing the wild and messy mix of styles and elements in Strode’s paintings.

6. Choose one word or phrase from your word bag to be the title, write it above your final poem, and you’re done!

Podcast and Audio Guide

Check out the Museum’s podcast and audio guide available for this exhibition!

Exhibitions Highlights: Thaddeus Strode joins curator Sabine Eckmann and Assistant Curator Meredith Malone to provide context and commentary on selected works from this exhibition. The symbol next to a painting indicates that the work is featured in the audio guide.

There are two ways to access the audio guide:

1. You can download the audio guide through the Kemper Art Museum’s special exhibition radio on iTunes, and bring your own iPod to the Museum, or

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Select one for the Special Exhibitions Podcast at http://kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/podcast.html

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SCHEDULE A FREE TOUR
Thaddeus Strode: Absolutes and Nothings

Cover: detail, Under the Killing Moon (…Spilling and Spilling…There Was a Point Where No One Resisted) (2007)—over eight feet high and twenty-four feet long—appears to be a massive draped canvas onto which we have seen images of layered map unpleasant images of writhing bodies, dismembered limbs, heads, gory red pools, and evil grinning faces. Like many of the works in this exhibition, we are encouraged by a protracted engagement with this disturbing performance. Allowing time for careful observation across this canvas brings new details to light, while satisfying our curiosity as well as igniting our creative imagination.

The addition of verbal bubbles, short phrases, and evocative titles further complements Strode’s usually complex paintings. While some of the titles articulate what Strode is traditionally supposed to communicate—but in word what is depicted on the canvas—many of these titles supply fragments of information that are not necessarily apparent from a single viewpoint. It is then that we see on the canvas.

Thaddeus Strode’s paintings are wild mixtures of California surf and skateboard culture, rock and roll, and more interactive exploration of Strode’s paintings for the program. The museum has developed a creative writing program—included on this program—and will enable viewers to spend more time with a single work in the exhibition and take a multisensory approach to the artist’s imaginative worlds.

The Doppelganger’s Boneyard, 2007. Mixed media on canvas, 98 x 83 x 13/16”. Private collection, Los Angeles. Thaddeus Strode: Absolutes and Nothings features twenty-three large-scale stand-alone paintings dating from 2004 to 2007. Thaddeus Strode is primarily focused on the last twenty years of single paintings. In the context of the exhibition, we have developed a creative writing program—Thaddeus Strode painting. It is important for the writer to have an understanding of Strode’s process:

While we eagerly follow such hints that suggest a story or a hidden message, we are also deeply moved by the painterly achievement in Strode’s work. The painting is an exploration of a densely layered and multi-figured composition—a kind of grid with a grid of imagery—perhaps a painting that has been cut up and carefully assembled. The image of the toad was taken from a mass-produced cookie jar that Strode bought at Wal-Mart. Strode’s paintings are based on the catalog essays by curators Sabine Eckmann and Meredith Malone as well as an interview conducted with Thaddeus Strode for the Museum’s newsletter.

The exhibition overview and information on individual activities in the galleries to encourage a closer look at and making meaning of the art in open discovery, facilitating the process of creating an original work of art. They mix up all kinds of painting and graphic styles in a nonhierarchical and, indeed, unpredictable manner. Everything that has been carefully established as an essential part of painting works as an integral part of the last century’s history and in the insurer's words.

Thaddeus Strode: Absolutes and Nothings

The addition of the exhibition, the Museum’s newsletter, and interviews conducted with Thaddeus Strode offer a comprehensive look at the artist’s imaginative worlds.

As we look at a piece of a magazine or a comic book, or an advertisement that has some kind of reference something. Even the way that, say, David Bowie and Beck would write down their songs, it is such a powerful medium. I'll love the way music works and how it affects people; it's such a powerful medium. I'll use song titles or little bits and pieces of lyrics for a title or in a cartoon bubble to reference something. Even the way that, say, David Bowie and Beck would write down their songs, and I’ll dip them up and dip them back together—that is akin to how I put a painting or drawing together and the process is that it is lyrical.
Thaddeus Strode: Absolutes and Nothings

Curated by Sabine Eckmann and Meredith Malone

Thaddeus Strode’s paintings are wild mixtures of California surf and skateboard culture, comic books, rock music, literature, horror films, and Zen philosophy. Populated with a range of fantastic imagery—amalgamated creatures, comic book characters, and graffiti marks. Figuration clashes and merges with abstract imagery so that we are unable to decipher a single narrative. Instead, we are led to take things out of context—something I find, in part, as a respite from the endless barrage of materials and nonlinear narratives that flood the contemporary American mindset and who openly conveys a spirit of intellectual curiosity and play.

Strode’s dreamlike compositions play with the viewer’s expectations and reward imaginative interpretations. Strode’s paintings are wild mixtures of California surf and skateboard culture, comic books, rock music, literature, horror films, and Zen philosophy. Populated with a range of fantastic imagery—amalgamated creatures, comic book characters, and impaled heads—Strode’s dreamlike compositions play with the viewer’s expectations and reward imaginative interpretations. Stringing together bits of text—in the form of a breeds of dissonant elements to create a bizarre otherworld. The title is divided into two parts, and points the reader in multiple directions at once. The first part alludes to the 1984 song “Under the Killing Moon” by Echo & the Bunnymen—a post-punk rock band whose album of the same name is considered one of the most influential in the post-punk genre. The song that deals with fate, death, and desire, while the second half is more oblique and eerie. The image of the toad was taken from a mass-produced cookie jar that Strode bought at Wal-Mart. It’s a process that is lyrical.

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**Artistic Career and Education**

Thaddeus Strode was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 16, 1975. He attended Loyola School in St. Louis where he studied with artists and theorists as diverse as John Baldessari, David Rabinowitch, and Jonathan定了. Strode received his BFA in Visual Art from the California Institute of the Arts where he studied with artists and theorists as diverse as John Baldessari, David Rabinowitch, and Jonathan Harrison. Strode's work is in public and private collections worldwide. Strode currently lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

**Exhibitions and Collections**

Strode's paintings are held in a number of private and public collections. His work is included in major collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the MoMA, San Francisco, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Strode has had solo exhibitions at a number of major museums and galleries, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Strode has also participated in group exhibitions at a number of prestigious institutions, including the Venice Biennale, the São Paulo Biennial, and the Liverpool Biennial. Strode's work has been well-received by critics and collectors alike, and he has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards.

**Influence and Inspiration**

Strode's work is influenced by a wide range of sources, including comic books, rock music, literature, horror films, and Zen philosophy. Populated with a range of characters and ideas, Strode's paintings often explore the boundaries of the modern world and the human experience. Strode's work has been described as being both absurdist and surrealistic, and he has been praised for his ability to create works that are both visually striking and conceptually complex.

**The Way I Work**

I work as if I'm collaging things together, and I collage with language and I take things out of context—something I've read, from a song, something I'm thinking about—and then I layer them with something else. I do that with images and painting styles too.

**Artist Bio**


**About this Guide**

This guide is designed as a companion to the special exhibition Thaddeus Strode: Absolutes and Nothings, part of the Art Program at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum. The guide provides an introduction to the artist’s imaginative worlds.

**Cover: detail, Thaddeus Strode: Absolutes and Nothings, 2005. Mixed media on canvas, 83 x 102” (249 x 259 cm). Goetz Collection, Munich.**

**FYI**

Strode’s paintings look messy. They are not only full of thick, dripping, and oozing paint, but and eccentric interpretations.

Strode’s dreamlike compositions play with the viewer’s expectations and reward imaginative and no-right-wrong approach to the artist’s imaginative worlds.

**The way I work is as if I’m collaging things together, and I collage with language and I take things out of context—something I’ve read, from a song, something I’m thinking about—and then I layer them with something else. I do that with images and painting styles too.** —Thaddeus Strode

**In the Saleman’s Gregory’s (2007)—over eight feet high and twentytwo feet long—we are engaged in a massive drag race in which we have seen figures that are being lifted across open spaces of empty fields of color, spinning cycles of bright paint, and cartoon-like shapes. Like many of the works in this exhibition, we are reminded by the psychologist’s engagement with this impossible painting. Allowing some time for your eye to rove across this canvas brings your details into focus, while satisfying your curiosity as well as igniting your creative imagination.

The addition of real-world objects, brushstrokes, and metaphorical titles further compound Strode’s abstract complex paintings. While some of the titles articulate what a title is traditionally supposed to communicate—to put into words thoughts, ideas, or emotions—it is often instead the reverse. A title is a hint or a glimmer—a way of luring the viewer into a deeper exploration of the work of art before them. A title is like a book that opens, and our imagination is able to fill in the gaps that we create in our mind, much like a mystery. The power of the title as a tool is limited only by the creativity and ingenuity of the viewer. A title is like a puzzle, and the viewer is encouraged to solve it in their mind.

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**In the Saleman’s Gregory’s (2007)—over eight feet high and twentytwo feet long—we are engaged in a massive drag race in which we have seen figures that are being lifted across open spaces of empty fields of color, spinning cycles of bright paint, and cartoon-like shapes. Like many of the works in this exhibition, we are reminded by the psychologist’s engagement with this impossible painting. Allowing some time for your eye to rove across this canvas brings your details into focus, while satisfying your curiosity as well as igniting your creative imagination.**

**Thaddeus Strode: Absolutes and Nothings**

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**Inventive Universes**

Free-form Writing Activity

Thaddeus Strode’s paintings can provide a stimulating and unique experience. When we look at his varied works of applying paint, his intricate use of imagery, and his suggestive titles, we might get lost in a sense of story that never seems complete. At the same time, Strode’s paintings guide the imagination and provide a jumping-off point from which we can create our own imaginative tales.

Through this free-from creative writing activity, you'll experience Strode’s paintings in a delightfully meditative manner—spending some time with a single work in the exhibition and then fully exploring the imaginative universes before us.

**Steps**

1. **After taking a walk through the exhibition, choose one work that specifically interests or challenges you. Write the title of the painting in the space below.**

2. **Spend several minutes looking at your chosen painting in the spaces below. Try to write down at least 5 words or phrases that pertain to each category—all pulled from your experience with this single painting.**

3. **Choose one word or phrase from your writing to be the title, write it above your final piece, and you’re done!**

**PODCAST AND AUDIO GUIDE**

Check out the Museum’s podcast and audio guide available for this exhibition!

**Exhibitions highlights:** Thaddeus Strode joins curators Sabine Eckmann and Meredith Malone to provide context and commentary on selected works from this exhibition. The symbol next to a painting indicates that the work is featured in the audio guide.

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**EVENTS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

**THADDEUS STRODE: ABSOLUTES AND NOTHINGS**

**Friday, February 1, 7-9 pm**

Kemper Art Museum

Don’t miss this unique opportunity to get the artist’s perspective on Thaddeus Strode present a walk through of the exhibition during the opening evening with curators Sabine Eckmann and Meredith Malone. Exhibition opening begins at 7 pm.

**Lecture: Douglas Fogle**

Friday, February 1, 6-8 pm

Douglas Fogle, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh where he is organizing the 2008 Carnegie International, will discuss the status of contemporary painting. Reception begins at 5 pm in the Kemper Art Museum.

**Curator’s Dialogue**

Thursday, March 27, 6-8 pm

Kemper Art Museum

Assistant Curator Meredith Malone leads a discussion and walk-through of Strode’s exhibition, discussing the curatorial process that went into bringing this exhibition to the Kemper Art Museum. Reception begins at 6 pm.

**EDUCATION GUIDE**

**MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM**

**February 8 - April 21, 2008**

**Washington University in St. Louis**

Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

*Supported by Thaddeus Strode, foundations, and individual donors including David & Sara Kemper, The David Woods Kemper Memorial Foundation, the Arlene & William J. Cook, and WashU students.*
**"Inventive Universes"**

Thaddeus Strode’s paintings can provide a welcoming source of excitement. When we look at his varied array of applying paint, in realistic representations, and in his imaginative titles, we might get lost in a world of stories that never seem complete. At the same time, Strode’s paintings guide the imagination and provide a jumping off point from which we can create our own inventive tales.

Through this free-form creative writing activity you will experience Strode’s paintings in a brilliantly meditative manner—spending some time with a single work in the exhibition and fully exploring the imaginative universes before us.

**Free-form Writing Activity**

1. **After taking a walk through the exhibition, select one work that specifically interests or challenges you. Write down the title of the painting in the space below.**

2. **Spontaneously choose a work from the exhibition in the space below. Try to write about at least 5 words or phrases that pertain to each category—all pulled from your experience with this single painting.**

3. **Write down at least 5 words or phrases that are the most interesting to you. Feel free to circle words from the painting’s title, words and phrases that are the most interesting to you.**

4. **Write down at least 5 words or phrases that are the most interesting to you. Feel free to circle words from the painting’s title, words and phrases that are the most interesting to you.**

5. **Now write down at least 5 words or phrases that are the most interesting to you. Feel free to circle words from the painting’s title, words and phrases that are the most interesting to you.**

6. **Choose one word or phrase from your final list to be the title, write it above your final piece, and you’re done!**

**PODCAST AND AUDIO GUIDE**

Check out the Museum’s podcast and audio guides available for this exhibition!

**Exhibitions Highlights:** Thaddeus Strode joins curators Sabine Eckmann and Meredith Malone for a preview of and commentary on selected works from the exhibition. The podcast will be available at the Kemper Art Museum and more fully explores the imaginative universes before us.

**There are two ways to access the audio guide:**

1. **You can download the text and audio files through the Kemper Art Museum’s special exhibition podcast on iTunes, and bring your own iPod to the Museum, or**

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**EDUCATION GUIDE**

MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM

**THADDEUS STRODE: ABSOLUTES AND NOTINGHS**

February 8 - April 21, 2008

**THEMATIC BREAKOUTS**

A stimulating and enjoyable way to experience art, culture, and education in St. Louis, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum is located on Washington University’s Danforth campus near the corner of Skinker & Forsyth Blvds.

FREE and open to the public 11-6 every day except Tuesday; open 11-8 on Friday. Visitor parking available; easy MetroLink access (one block south of Forsyth Station at 1800 Forsyth). 314.935.7918 kempereartmuseum.wustl.edu

**Support for Thaddeus Strode’s Exhibition and Nothing Drop provided by Louis M. Kemper, Jr., The David Woods Kemper Memorial Foundation, The Kemper Leave for East, and Foundation members.**

**EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS**


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