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Submitted photo

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But I keep returning to his 2012 painting, "Untitled Still Life" (acrylic on canvas) Since the exhibition's opening in early September, I have often revisited the Bowman Gallery where it hangs to look again at this painting, and I usually chose a seat near this painting during the museum's Sunday concerts.

In fact, one of the great pleasures of attending the museum's concert series, in addition to the excellence of the musical performances, is the opportunity to contemplate works of art during an hour of relaxed meditation.

Buckner's "Untitled Still Life," is a masterful compilation of his several interests in painting subjects. In the top half of this 60-inch-by-50-inch canvas is a blue sky with cumulus clouds developed from his marsh landscapes of New York and New Jersey; the cityscape view from his studio window in Brooklyn is recognizable from his many studies of the New York City urban landscape. The lower half of the canvas, however, is a summation and representation of the artist in still life. Using the age-old technique of the Dutch masters, Buckner arranges a table, drapes it with cloth, and fills it with the objects that will tell the story he wishes to address. The edge of the table is set back from the bottom of the picture plane, giving the viewer a painted space that invites entry into the place portrayed in the painting.

In the current exhibition, "Still Life: The Painted Image," at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts are several paintings by Brooklyn artist Derek Buckner.

Among these are a large painting of tousled bed pillows — a monochrome study in white — and a smaller painting also in whites, of a pile of mini marshmallows. This accomplished artist has explored these themes (paintings in white and paintings of marshmallows) as well as cityscapes, marsh landscapes, aerial urban highway views, and studies of truck parking lots.

Monochrome studies in white are the stuff of traditional academic painting classes. Many an artist has cut teeth on these exercises. At worst, they flop entirely, and become flat, toneless and disorganized. At best, they are virtuoso paintings, requiring great skill in the use of a wide color palette including reds, yellows, and blues to create the illusion of light and shadow, tonality, and volume, but all the while appearing to be paintings done entirely in shades of white. Of the several compelling paintings by Derek Buckner, the two white

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Here, we are visitors to Buckner's studio. We see his subjects and his artistic materials including cans of turpentine, bottles of linseed oil, tubes of paint, a can of varnish, paint brushes and an artist-printmaker's poupée. We acknowledge and appreciate his use of shiny, reflective and transparent materials in his still life, which prove his technical prowess.

Like the Dutch masters who painted paring knives precariously pointing in our direction, protruding off the front edge of the table, Derek Buckner paints his studio scissors in a similar way. So we are simultaneously invited into the painting by its enticing and sometimes curious objects (a figurine of Goofy next to an eggbeater) and warned off by the sharp and pointy scissors.

Then we notice that we are being watched by the artist himself, who looks out at us from the lower right corner of the painting (a witty surrogate signature, perhaps). He is dressed in a blue T-shirt, with stubbled beard and behind him is a precariously tilting stack of leaning picture frames. My memory takes me back to Diego Velázquez' masterpiece, "Las Meninas," 1656). Derek Buckner has adopted the artist's gaze, the position of the head, the angle of the eyes, and the facial expression of Velázquez' self-portrait within Las Meninas.

Another more immediate artistic tribute in Buckner's painting is to artist Wayne Thiebaud (American, born 1920). Wayne Thiebaud, a California artist who became linked by gallerists and critics to the Pop Art movement, is most well-known for his paintings of food, particularly assembly-line-made pastries and pies and cakes, all painted in lush color and texture, as can be seen on the cover of the Wayne Thiebaud book in Buckner's painting. Buckner's series of marshmallow paintings, one of which is included in the exhibition at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, shows the artist's response to Thiebaud's paintings of sweets. Thiebaud also made paintings of Disney characters, including Goofy and is credited with the quote, "an artist creates his own world".

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