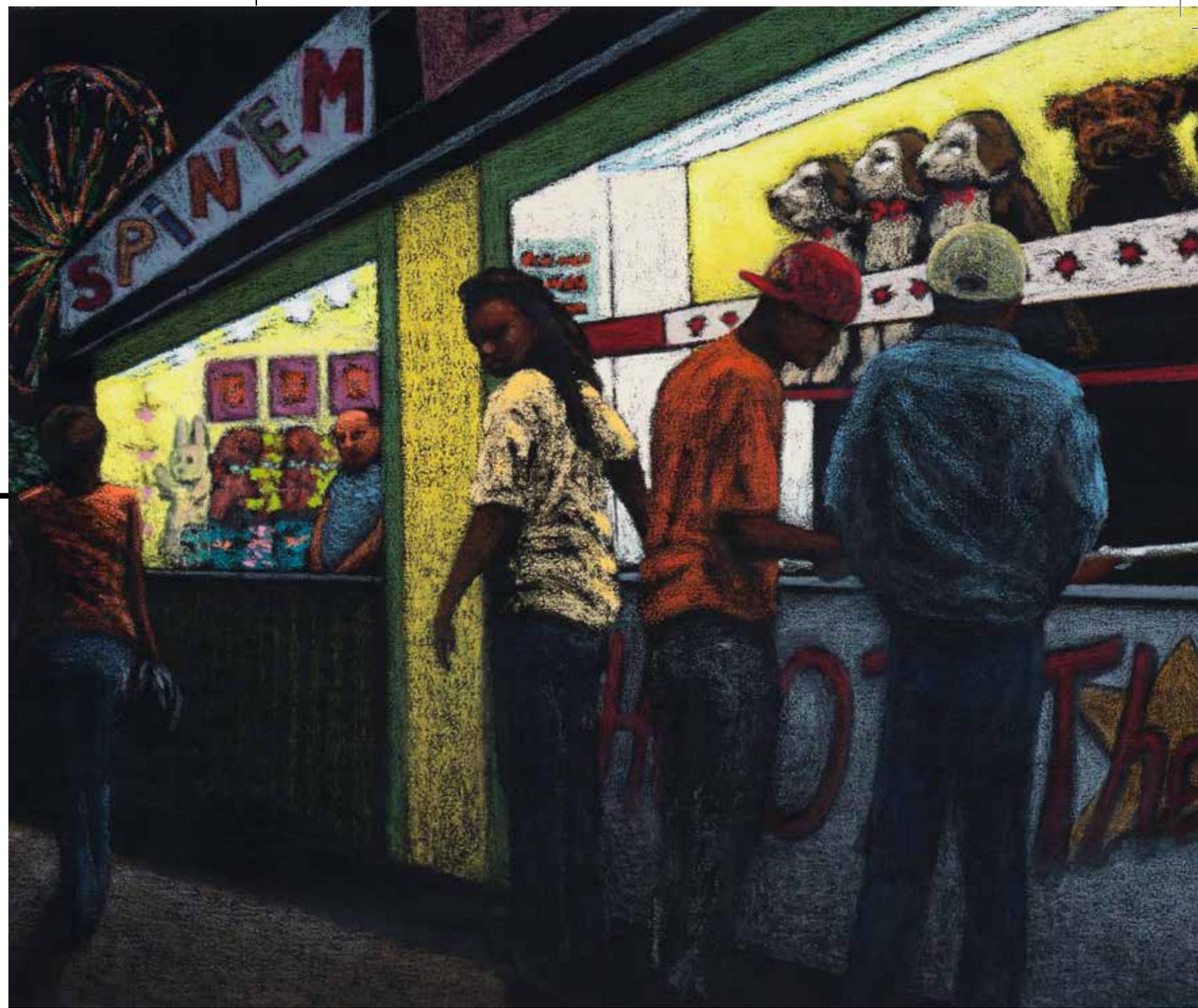


## Casino Culture

Jane Dickson

The globalization of casino culture – socioeconomically, environmentally and politically – looms terrifyingly ascendant today. As sensory overload systems designed to untether participants from the restraints of normal reason take over every sector, consideration of the structural manifestations of this Architecture of Distraction is urgently needed. The seismic global shifts of the 21st century, particularly the bare knuckles “Winner Takes All” paradigm favored by the current US president foreground the issues of reality and illusion, machismo and vulnerability within the glossy rigged systems that operate virtually within the digital environment’s endless labyrinth of pop-ups, tweet storms, spam and scams. Earlier brick mortar manifestations of casinos and other spectacularly unnatural environments such as Coney Island, Times Square and Las Vegas are updated as digital-screen-rich spectacles lure the touch screen addicted to play and pay on and on.

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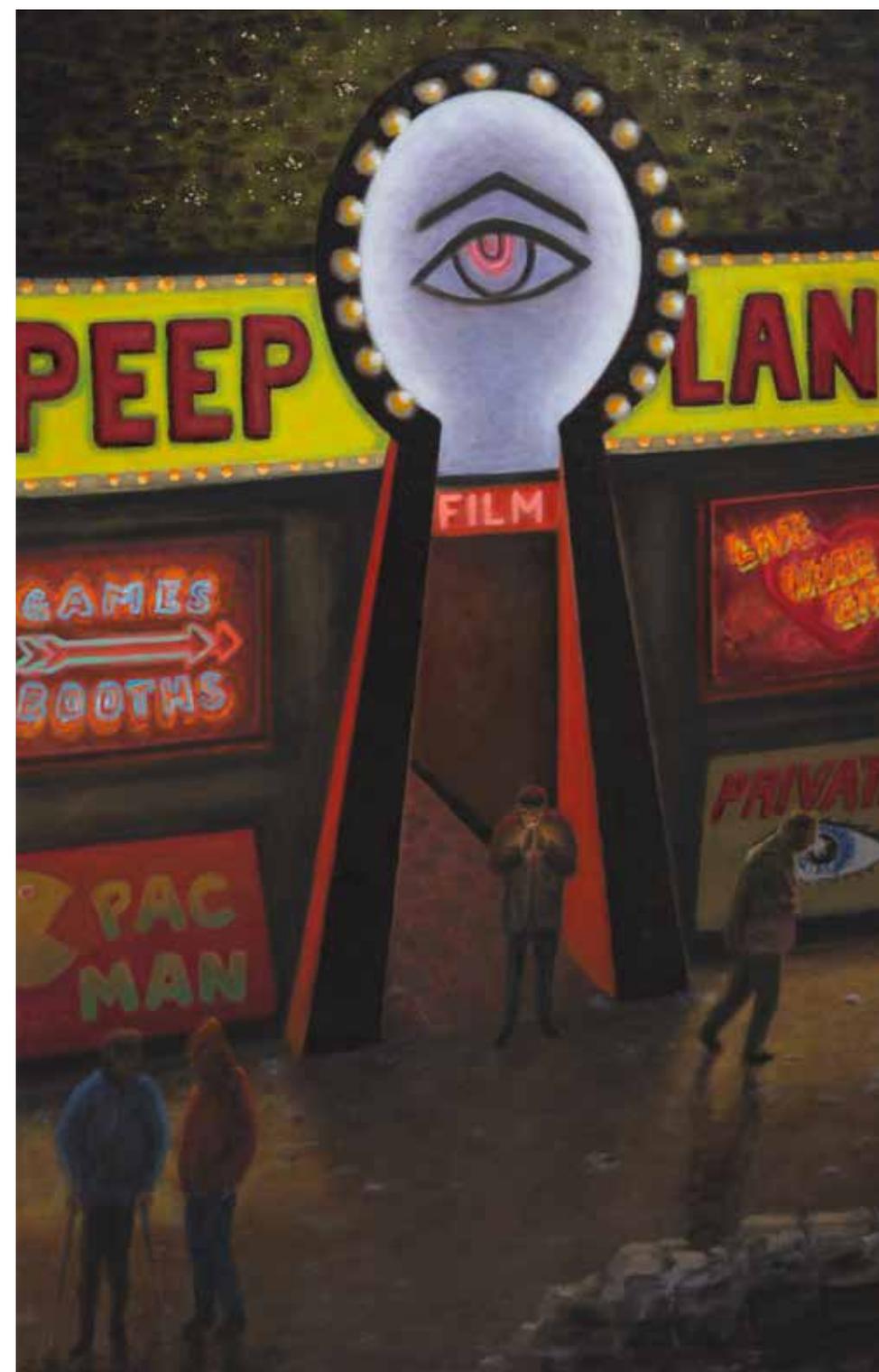


*Shoot the Stars*, 2005, oilstick on linen, 48 x 60 in.

I have engaged painting in a life-long study of American-ness, eagerly foraging through our shifting landscape for insights into my own concerns that are also key themes in the broader cultural dialogue. Reframing the iconic into distilled images of broadly shared experience, I aim to create space for examination of some of the complex embedded values and assumptions of our urban/suburban present. I seek to capture cusp moments, pivot points of mutating cultural parameters within which this conglomeration, an immigrant nation, struggles to survive. My goal as a realist is to capture and clarify baseline reality as I perceive it in this increasingly unstable world, to add valuable documentation of this time and place to the dialogue of my time.

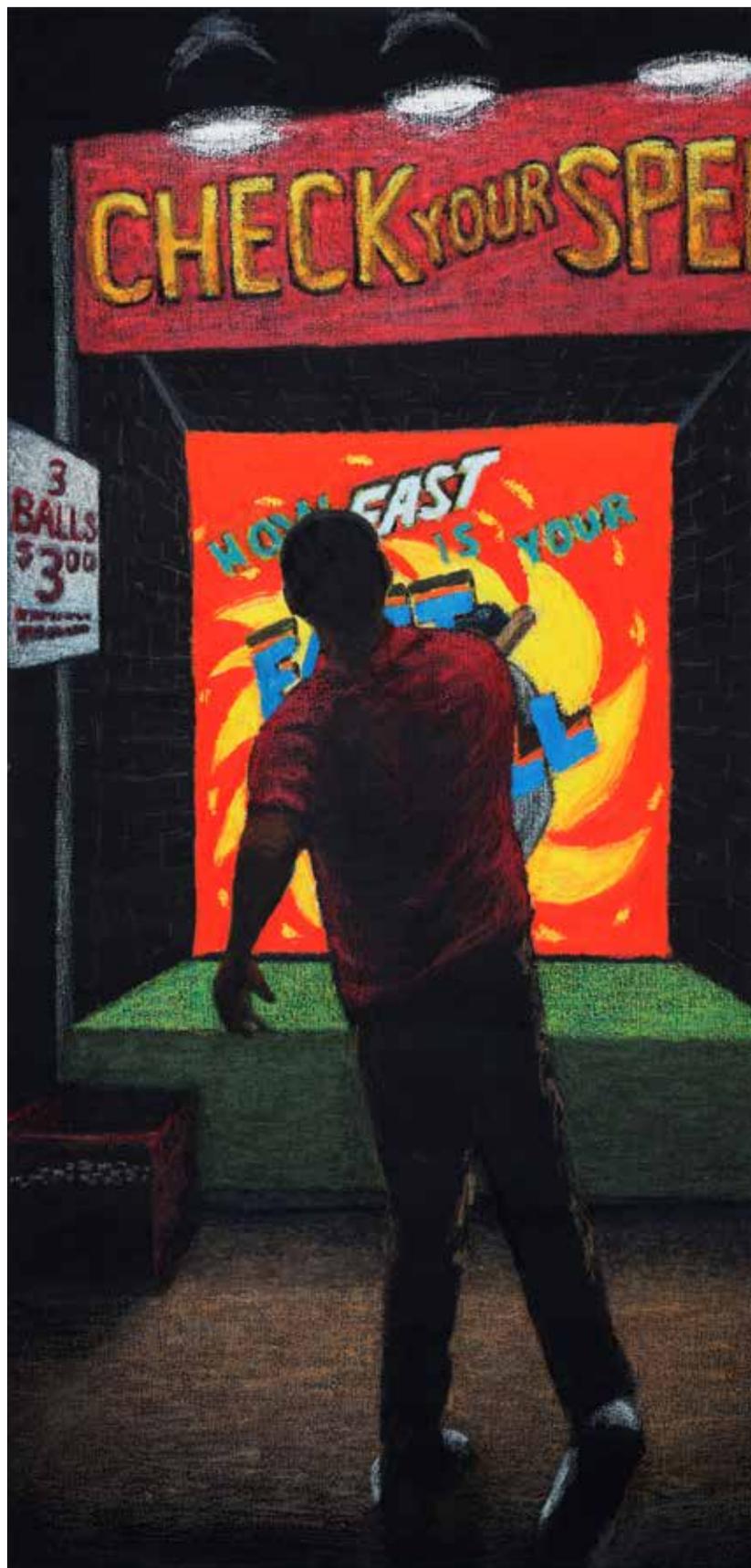
My trajectory has become a spiral, as I return to earlier subjects with new insights and new materials which lead on to fresh subjects reflecting further aspects of the same issues. I counter balanced examinations of the macho sensory overload of Times Square, Las Vegas, and Demolition Derbies with explorations of the mute, ill-considered surrounding sprawls of highways, tunnels, and strip malls. The tension of being a woman, often a gatecrasher, having to operate in places where I don't really belong, agitating for closer-to-equal respect and resources than what I'm usually offered, has formed my personality and much of

*Las Vegas 9 (Gameboy 2), 2010,*  
oil on canvas, 24 x36 in.



*Big Peepland, 2016, oil on linen, 70 x 44 in.*

*Check You Speed 3 Balls, 2005, oilstick on linen, 83 x 40 in.*



my work. As a young artist I chose to paint what I feared, macho subjects, Times Square strip clubs, Hip Hop, Demo Derbies, highways and garages all unwelcoming, often dangerous, male realms. Most identity art has splintered the public into a prism of isms, each focused on itself, feminists commenting on women to women, Latinos commenting on Latinos to Latinos etc. Crossing boundaries to describe the male world from a female perspective gives me the unexpected power of the unfamiliar vantage point, how men look to women, for men and for women

I zoom out to high vantage points to focus on overviews, where the tangled super-structures and infrastructures of city streets, thruways, fun parks, and casinos' labyrinths reveal the overlapping vortex of systems haphazardly intersect channeling our hunger for at least the illusion of transcendence. Then I zoom back in to focus on individuals struggling to hold a place in harsh glaring cityscapes.

*Dreamland 14, 2012, acrylic on felt, 40 x 55 in.*





*Las Vegas 43 (Autoloan), 2010, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in.*

*San Genaro Up in the Air 2, 2007, oilstick on linen, 52 x 72 in.*



My focus on the man-made extends to materials, recruiting various synthetics, such as astroturf, vinyl, sandpaper, Tyvek or carpet, as paint grounds, selected both for sensual tactility and for the resonance of a particular material with a particular subject; fake grass, for windshield-viewed blurs of nature; sandpaper for “look but don’t touch” strippers; carpet samples for portraits of

suburban homes. I choose to allow these substrates to shiver through the image visually challenging the coherence of the illusion I have created, reminding viewers that something lies behind the image, highlighting layers of references. I chose to examine the psychological freight of the manmade world, focusing on the social structuring of fear and desire and its disruptions by

the familiar grown strange, aiming to pull the unnoticed, the unquestioned background “room tone” of daily life into the foreground, thus providing space for reflection on the usually unquestioned substrates of our lives. I am at an ecstatic moment in my work, eagerly foraging through our shifting landscape for reflections of my own concerns that are key themes in the broader dialogue.

**Acknowledgments:** Many thanks to Jim Blasi for preliminary graphic design.

#### Biography

Jane Dickson is the painter of American darkness, first recognized in the early 1980s for her depictions of Times Square as part of the politically charged 1980's scene of New York artists working at the intersection of street art, hip hop, film and installation.

Dickson's focus encompasses the architecture of distraction; demolition derbies, carnivals, casinos, strip malls and highways utilizing industrial materials such as astroturf, sandpaper, vinyl and felt for their subliminal associations as well as their tactile qualities.

Her work has been exhibited globally and is included in the collections of more than 30 museums including The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York and the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

A book on Dickson's early work will be published in the fall of 2018 by Anthology Press.

*Las Vegas 60 (Pink Poker Palace), 2011, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in.*

