

Maxwell Cloe: This one caught my attention. I think it's called *The Food of Boyhood*. It caught my attention because it has a cow in it and I don't think you've painted any other cows. Tell me about this pink cow.

Dustin Hall: It's supposed to be cartoonish; you're supposed to laugh at it. It's not a serious painting at all. It's quartered. I think there's seventeen cuts of beef, maybe there's more and maybe there's less. Whatever. So I wanted to reference that. This painting specifically was to be hung in Lexington at the University of Kentucky. So I wanted it to be thoughts of the middle of the state. So on one, on the butt roast quarter, there's Lexington. The shoulder blades are Neon, maybe. Between those, sort of where the thigh is and where the stomach is are words like "starve," I think is there, and "begging." It's supposed to be like a comment on food access, specifically. Again, cherries are so expensive to get them here. I'm sure in Washington, they're cheaper. I would imagine that you wouldn't pay that much money for what's growing in your backyard. But here, you can't afford to buy cherries. Three pounds is twenty-one dollars. It's not possible. I had this idea of, how do you represent access to good things when you don't have access to them? I thought about what happens in Lexington. There's a lot of cow farming. Angus beef production. Those are very expensive cows. You can make a lot of money on one slaughter, basically. By the pound, it's like six dollars a pound or something. So these farmers are really raking it in with the cows in Fayette County, or Madison County or wherever else around the region. My being a person making art for Lexington, there's a sort of relationship between here and there. I put my home on one end of the cow and they're on the other end of the cow. Between them is this blight of having nothing good to eat. We have no restaurants in Letcher County, or the region really, that you can choose from. I think you can only get certain food, actually. I'll make a side judgement; you have this total deficit of all culture when living here and it almost becomes like a vacuum, that's not the right word, like a bell jar, rather, of like, you know, having nothing and relying on Amazon or something. Which is a moral quandary but what else do you have, right? And you have to stop at Hobby Lobby to get canvases, which I hate, it's disgusting that you have to do that but what else do you have? You're either a painter or you don't, right? I was harboring all this resentment when I made this painting. So what you end up with is almost an indictment of Lexington, really. We have this like fat of the land cultural center and then you have nothing. And it should be the other way around because, historically speaking, see Appalachia, specifically eastern Kentucky—Harvard owned land here for research purposes. I think Yale also does, maybe even Columbia too. There's still pieces of coal property owned by entities in Pittsburgh and most hillsides are owned by corporations as well. The grandson of the coal corporations or whomever. And so, you get to the point of looking at it where all these people took our stuff to give themselves access to better stuff and we have nothing. At all. So when you look at Lexington, as recently as 2013, I think, 150 thousand dollars, approximately, was given to Rupp Arena of our coal severance tax money? There's no explanation for it, they just did it. They were given it by the state or something. And what do we have? We have garbage trucks that are severance tax funded. So, you look at the idea of this cultural emblem of Lexington being built literally by our money, and we have garbage trucks. It's a very heavy-handed, clear metaphor. And also reality, that I wanted to explore. It really pisses me off a lot. You go to Pittsburgh, and they had this moment around the same time that coal crashed when steel crashed, people were buying steel from China at this point. I feel guilty about this. It was kind of hard at the time to feel sympathy for people in Pittsburgh because Pittsburgh wouldn't be Pittsburgh without Appalachian coal and it's so, like, it's almost like a competition of poverty

almost where I was pissed off. How dare you want sympathy, when we've had nothing, we've never had anything? This is very melodramatic and I'm getting off-topic [laughs]. But this is what it felt like to me. It's a cartoon painting. It's supposed to make you laugh. But it's just me being pissed off, basically. That's what the whole painting is. So, I never personally painted pastoral scenes or whatever, I don't really care about flatlands. That painting is obviously in a field and there's a red barn. It's very Midwest and deep South, so.