

WRITTEN REPORT

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B.F.A., SONOMA STATE UNIVERISTY, 2003

A Report Submitted to the Lamar Dodd School of Art

Of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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4/24/07

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"We are taught to choose our words carefully, lest they betray us. The assumption is that words say what they mean but must be kept under watch for fear that they might express something slightly more, slightly other than, or even contrary to what we intend. Such corruptions of language have two main causes. First is our own uncertainty about what we really think and how much we actually wish to reveal. Second is the actual polyvalence of symbols and the tendency of their multiple aspects to recombine and create unexpected, perhaps unwanted meanings. Thus, we aspire to absolute clarity but live with ambiguity."¹

¹ Robert Storr, *Disparities and Deformations. Our Grotesque*. Pg 10

“Those fucking mean little drawings!”

- Judy McWillie

Distorting a figure acts to make the figure a fetish object, and the spectator a fetishist. It's a method that coerces you into looking at the parts and the expense of the whole. It's about fucking up the ideal and our holistic self-image and making the figure an artificial thing. Deformation causes a human being to become a character; there is subversion in its lack of fidelity to an ideal. It's something to be looked at and to be read, not something to understand. Gestalt is impossible here. A character does not have any real personality. It's a collection of distortions, a monster. This is similar to Freud's notions of the mechanics of dreams.

“The first achievement of the dream-work is condensation. By that we understand the fact that the manifest dream has a smaller content than the latent one, and is thus an abbreviated translation of it...”

He continues;

“You will have no difficulty in recalling instances from your own dreams of different people being condensed into a single one... This composite structure is of course emphasizing something that the four people have in common.”¹

Like Freud, what I mean to point out is that I am interested in this kind of distortion as a composite. I am not looking to art as a kind of escapist fantasy, but as a way to critically look at the world around me. Underlying the problems in our collective desire for cohesion and showing that it's really never there.

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, translated and edited by James Strachey. New York: Liveright/W, W, Norton and Company, 1997, pp 171-172

Cohesion is an illusion that's been particularly fostered by contemporary consumer culture. Photography and television offer up a homogenized version of the ideal, where every place looks just like home and every supermarket feels safe. Traditionally caricature and satire have used the grotesque to point out the fractures inherent in the world, highlighting the impossibility in any kind of wholeness.

Ultimately I am striving to make caricatures of this contemporary situation. Caricatures that take general concerns as their subjects instead of being about a specific individual. Everything is really encoded, and this denial of clear and quick meaning is a hostile act directed at the viewer. I am showing you an aesthetic image that has a visual logic governing its form without giving you everything.

SPECIFIC WORK:

Puppets and Animation

'Pink Nekkid Lady' is a medium size screen print of a paper doll arrayed in parts on a sheet of paper. Included are indications of where to punch holes for the joints. The viewer could potentially cut out and assemble the character and literally act out the narrative, but of course the prints existence as an academic art object, residing under glass in a frame, thwarts this. It is a half step to literalizing a looped narrative. Later on I would make and construct actual puppets for use in animation, but with this print the construction is all implied. Instead of hinting at a range of narrative motion in the imagined space of an image, the print alludes to the fact that real physical motion was possible.

After 'Pink Nekkid Lady' I began to create actual puppets. The puppets were drawings that were cut out and assembled to allow for movements at the joints. I then made animations with these puppets, intending to out actions related to my drawings. There were characters and implied actions, but I never saw them specifically as having any kind of life before or after what was being viewed. In a sense it becomes a non-narrative space. They existed to forever repeat the same gestures shown in the drawing, over again and over again. Animation is a way to make that relationship literal.

Coincidentally, I also started working with hand drawn animation, 'Skin the Rabbit', 'Intestines', 'Fool With a Broken Leg', and 'And This Happens to the Lucky Ones'. 'Skin the Rabbit', for example, was a looped image of a rabbit pulling of its own skin. 'Intestines' involved an intestinal image tying and untying itself in a knot. Each of these animations dealt with a kind of futility implicit in a looped repetitive action.

These hand drawn animations also became a way of using a system to generate artwork. I made a two-dimensional work based of every one of these animations. As in printmaking or photography, in animation there is never any real original. The actual materials photographed are only props until the animation is cut and watched in time. 'Rabbit, Rabbit' was a an arrangement of all the frames used in the 'Skin the Rabbit' film set up in a grid and ink jet printed actual size. It could be read in any sequence, up, down, left to right, etc and still create the movement of the animation in the viewer's eye. With 'Intestines' each actual frame, the one that was photographed for the film, was mounted onto panel and then hung in a similar grid arrangement. Using the actual 'cell', which is usually not a valued object once it is filmed, and giving it another way to display itself, another life. 'Fool With a Broken Leg' I traced a couple of important key frames, which were necessary indicative of the whole narrative onto sheets of paper then displayed as a drawing, with the intention of editioning it like a print. With 'And This is What Happens to the Lucky Ones' I opted to make copies of the key frames, the principal frames, and then mount them on panel.

Panel Prints

I've spent much of the last three years trying to mimic one technique with another. With 'Eli-Pee' and other prints I was mimicking drawings, specifically getting at an ink and wash manner I was using in my sketchbooks. I was having trouble using this style effectively in stand-alone drawings, and I thought that transforming them into prints would resolve this problem. This style in turn came out of an attempt to translate my etching and aquatint style into a drawing; each way of working folds into the other.

The panel pieces are intaglio prints adhered onto panels. With these I was still very interested in the physicality of the work, which seems in some ways to be contradictory since I gravitate to techniques meant for reproduction and that represent visually as flat. By putting the prints onto panels a couple of things happened. First, it gave them this quality as a shape or an object. It made the image solid. The prints bonded with the panel and the paper disappears.

Secondly, it solved a problem of presentation, given that I have never been very happy with framing work. I don't like how the glass sets up a barrier between the viewer and the line. It undoes a lot of the work in making the image so physical. I also don't care for the trend of tacking up works on paper like some appeal to their street credibility by virtue of their "rawness". This choice in presentation made visual the dissatisfaction of being either institutional (academic) or teenage

rebellion. The frustrating illusion of choice of participating in a debate where neither side is particularly accurate to real positions.

'Ell-Pee' marks my transition to the panel pieces, in which I was able to get at a type of physicality of the image's surface. At this time I stopped printing in black ink and started mixing a leaden grey that allowed the print to feel less like a print and more like a drawing with an atmosphere created by the ink. The new surface gives an illusion of intimacy and directness usually attributed to drawing, and typically not granted to prints.

The panels were not meant to be diptychs, but were broken up into sections similar to the panels in a comic strip. In other words, that they are a compound image, not a grouping that is to be seen close together. They are to be read like a book or a comic strip one image taken in and informing the meaning of the next. Fracturing a single image from a drawing into this different space. Instead of taking an image in with whole glance and trying to lead the viewer from point to point with elements of composition, I'm taking each major point in the image and in turn making it into its own image. The works comprised of three panels, were more explicitly sequential. 'St. Paul' and 'She Fights for Truth for All of America's Children' were attempts to continue this relationship beyond the book reference and create longer sequential like narratives. By lengthening this relationship it becomes closer to a comic strip or a film than a book. This is an influence that creeps in due to the overlapping concern with animation.

Sketchbook Drawings

The "Sketchbook Drawings" are translations of small (around 6" x 5") sketchbook drawings into a larger space. Mimicking the quality of the materials enlarged several hundred percent. In the background there is also the idea of this translating without optical aids, without a projector, camera, or grid. I wanted to make an imperfect copy, one that translated the original but also allowed for a space to improvise, to make the image a copy that was specific to that moment. This activity of creating one image from an intermediary other is analogous to the process of printmaking and photography, where the matrix is never actually the same thing as the resulting print. My translation is an action that represents and reproduces the original material, allowing for shifts in meaning, not simply repeating it.

Souvenir

'Souvenir' is a series of twelve prints each individual print is comprised of two images next to each other. The image on the left is an obituary photograph from a newspaper, and the other is an intaglio print of an interpretation of the photograph. The obituary photograph acts a summary of someone's entire life, it's acting as a contemporary form of portraiture. The image is visual shorthand

for who this person was rather than an accurate likeness. It's meant to be an ideal form of this person. You never see photographs of people laying in state, which at one point was the accepted tradition for preserving the memory of the deceased. Rarely do you ever see the subject as they looked immediately prior to their death; instead you typically get images of the subjects at their apparent prime such as wedding days, graduation, and military inductions. Someone, not the deceased, picked out this one particular photograph to represent their loved one in a manner not exactly representative of what they looked like at the time of their death.

'Souvenir' is engineered to fail from the start. The fine art print can't ever be good enough, true enough, next to the photograph. I'm echoing Baudelaire's objections to Photography.

"If photography is allowed to deputize for art in some of art's activities, it will not be long before it has supplanted or corrupted art altogether, thanks to the stupidity of the masses, its natural ally."²

"Will the honest observer declare that the invasion of photography and the great industrial madness of today are wholly innocent of this deplorable result? Can it legitimately be supposed that a people whose eyes get used to accepting the results of a material science as products of the beautiful will not, within a given time, have singularly diminished its capacity for judging and feeling those things that are most ethereal and immaterial?"³

This complaint is not just a 19th Century concern. More recently David Hockney voiced these similar concerns in a 2004 interview in *Modern Painters*.

² Charles Baudelaire, "Salon of 1859", *Selected Writings On Art And Artists*, Translated by P. E. Charvet, Penguin Books, 1972. pg 295-296

³ Ibid, pg 297-298

"The idea that painting was dead, which always thought was a mad idea, was supposed to mean that photography did things for us that painting used to do, but of course that's not the case."⁴

"Essentially the camera sees geometrically and we see psychologically. Geometrically speaking something's size is determined in relation to something else but psychologically that's not the case."⁵

Rationally we know full well, especially in the digital age, that photographs are not true and accurate depictions of reality, but culture repeatedly invests in them the authority of reality notably at the expense of physicality and subjectivity. All this points to problems with our own cameras, our eyes and memory, and we really can't face that. Photographs are real and have the authority of the real because we need our eyes to be real and authoritative. To admit that photography is as subjective as the painting opens up a trauma in how we view our own empiricism.

'Souvenir' literalizes this relationship. Instead of drawing an image meant as a cultural indictment, I'm drawing a picture of a photograph. Placing the photographic picture right there next to the drawn picture means that viewers can make the judgment themselves, between drawing and the photographs competing claims at legitimacy. The setup points back to the image and back to myself simultaneously. It is about accepting blame for all the shortcomings of an art object in the face and presence of the seemingly objective recorded reality.

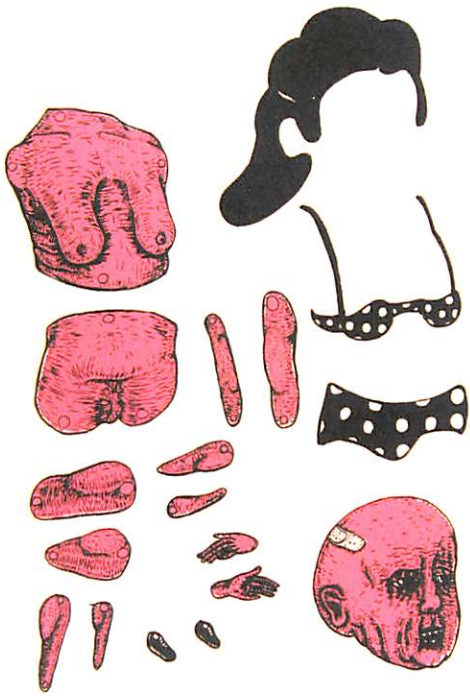
⁴ David Hockney in "Painting is Just Better", *Modern Painters*, Spring 2004. P 24

⁵ Ibid, P 25

And to me I think it's obvious, in looking at my work, that I'm deeply interested in the subjective experience. It represents the world without falling into the bias of the camera. Photography flattens everything, removes its psychological depth, while seemingly being a record of what's right there in front of you. But it lacks the emotional subjectivity that, like it or not, is very much a part of how we observe the world around us.

It should however be noted that several references are conspicuously absent from this report, notably a discussion on Lacan's interpretations of Freud. Specifically Lacan's notions of the construction of a coherent self image and its impossibility, as discussed in his essays on the Mirror Stage. Also notably absent is the discussion of postmodern ideas dealing with the total loss of reality and the emergence of a meta-reality, as discussed by Baudrillard, Debord and others. The concept of modern life that is based solely on a simulacra, and their perceived impossibility of any true referent to reality would complicate my discussions on the effect photography has on the world and the arts. Here I must point out that this text is a report on my concepts and process that were involved in the creation of the work displayed in the MFA show as well as related to it. However much the above concerns beg to be discussed along with these omissions, these absent ideas were not the primary interests in the creation of the work. In many ways the creation of this work, specifically in *Souvenir*, have led me to these concerns, but are not oblique about my understanding of them. I anticipate that the next body of work will confront these ideas in relation to my

apprehensions of photography and contemporary culture's relationship with reality.



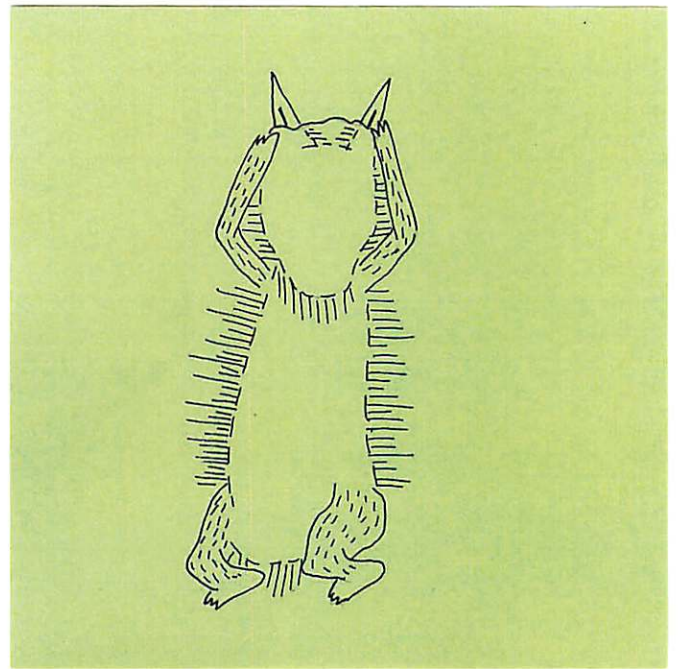
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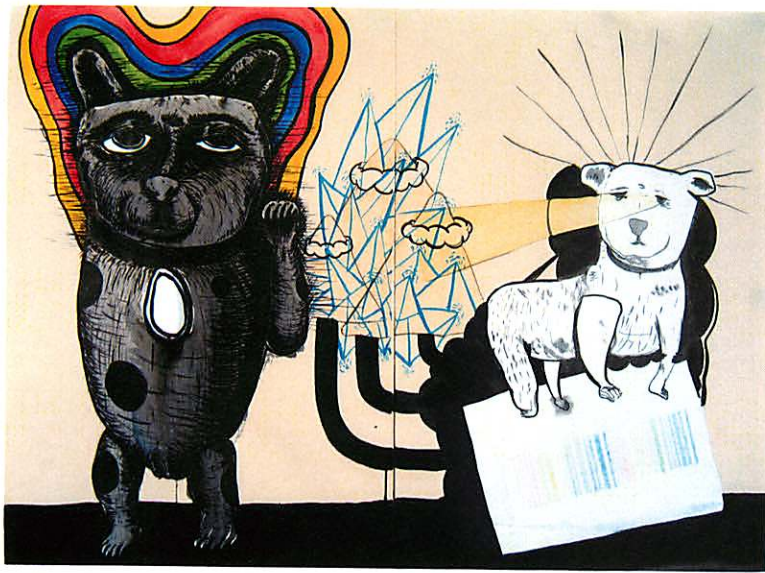
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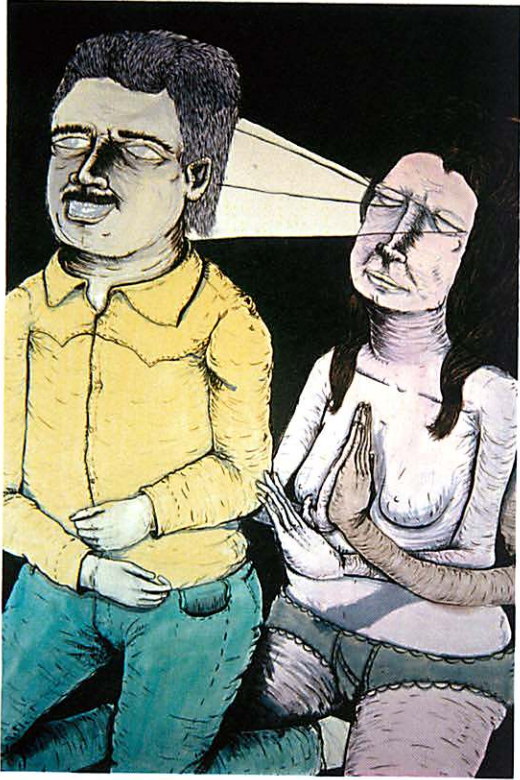
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