HI HONEY I'M HOME

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HI HONEY I’M HOME

A THESIS
PRESENTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY
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MAY 2009

ACCEPTED BY:
SYDNEY CROSS, COMMITTEE CHAIR
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ABSTRACT

My work is generated from an internal struggle which arises from the transition of my youth to my adulthood. Through my experiences, I have come to believe that there is a significant deficit in what signifies the transition to adulthood in contemporary society. I view that our contemporary rites of passage differ greatly from historical cultures and wish to conjoin the two with my personal mythology and through contemporary and pop culture to possibly shed light on my seeming sense of arrested development. I am interested in depicting my own fantastical rites as if I lived in both cultures overcoming obstacles in a primitive manner with an opinion founded in technology.

I am interested in objects from American culture that are relevant to my personal history. Through the use of appropriation and re-contextualization I establish my own position while creating a dialogue with culture at large. I took inspiration from historical and contemporary artists who worked in similar aesthetics. Artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Christian Marclay, and Richard Prince are identified for their use of appropriation. Where the printed matter of my work is original, my audio and video work is completely appropriated. I re-contextualize and disfigure particular and personal pop culture artifacts through such acts as sampling and looping to coincide with my printed work. The themes and ideas concentrated within the audio and video works derive from my curiosity and concern in my views of growing up, what that entails, and how that is accomplished.
DEDICATION

In no particular order, I would like to thank the following:

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My work is generated from an internal struggle which arises from the transition of my youth to my adulthood. Through my experiences, I have come to believe that there is a significant deficit in what signifies the transition to adulthood in contemporary society. I view that our contemporary rites of passage differ greatly from historical cultures and wish to conjoin the two with my personal mythology and through contemporary and pop culture to possibly shed light on my seeming sense of arrested development.

Presumed graduation ceremonies, in-debt up to one’s neck, and registering to enlist in the armed forces are all passages that differ greatly from rites of other so-called primitive cultures. Hence solo journeys of survival into the wild, conquering untamable beasts, and enduring seemingly unfathomable pain as a form of transcendence are acceptable forms of transition in other societies. I believe our complacency with technology has rendered us victims to a state which is not only void of quality, but is rife with misunderstandings to contemporary society. Elaborate cellular phones are used to do a million tasks but hardly used to verbally communicate. Networking sites are used to profile and customize us, yet our homepages are essentially formatted the same. To top it all, when tangible conversations arise, these tools affect the way we inadvertently interact with each other. I am interested in depicting my own fantastical rites as if I lived in both cultures overcoming obstacles in a primitive manner with a neutral technological opinion. I wish to recreate what was once viewed as primitive and to understand my seeming arrested development through this body of work.

Through a series of copper plate etchings and drawings, I depict intricately unsound structures that are somehow still standing, thrown together and seemingly un-functional. The array of marks acts as a complex layering of expressionist thought created through fluid drypoint lines of twine and deep rich grooves of engraved stilts. The structures’ surroundings allude to an open
interpretation of home. Home is a space where one is indigenous, where origin and environment play an important role, and give a reason for return. These structures lack this sense and are depicted with a sparse picture plain, void of a specific time and space. The white of the paper mixed with the minimal plate tone from the impression creates a barren environment. This allows the viewer to focus solely on the structure while having the environment play a role of possible insecurity and isolation. The overall composition is meant to be perplexing with disproportionate creatures and impractical foundations, reflecting an abstracted structure and environment.

The creatures act as metaphorical obstacles one must overcome in life to transcend to a higher level in their own culture. The aftermath of the rite of passage is conveyed through what type of creature the structure is made from. Though the rite of passage is ambiguous, the mixture of the artwork’s title and the creature’s genus classification gives a starting point for the viewer. All that is known is that these animals are appropriated from pop culture, have succumbed and transformed into a structural trophy. The beast’s life has been taken to prove the strength, cunning, and overall accomplishment of the hunter.

In *Rite of Self Worth: Siiruulian Phantele Hut (I Love You Max Rebo)* (Fig. 1.1), a slayed rotting quasi-referential sci-fi pop culture pacaderm is thrown on top of a structure as a form of home and trophy display. This rite of killing and display enforces my desire to harness and capture the creature’s capabilities and acts as a sign of accomplishment that should garner respect from fellow tribespersons.

The piece *Rite of Death: Rhincodon typus Drum Room* (Fig. 1.2) depicts a strapped and beached whale shark that is transformed into a structure in which a ceremonial drum solo had once been performed. I view death as an unknown journey, and it occupies a place in my work in direct
correlation to my fear and respect for immense bodies of water. It seems fitting that the rhythm of water and life be fulfilled with a lurid and intense drum solo, a lament and a grand opus to solidify the end of the creature’s journey through life and the beginning of its journey into death. An archway of *Carcharodon megalodon* teeth gives entry to the room to signify the vulnerability of our existence, the mark we make in history, and the effect we leave on our surroundings and culture.

In *Rite of Discovery: Chlamydoselachus anguineus Lean-to* (Fig. 1.3), the frill shark, a lone sea creature that was thought to be extinct, is presented on a structure. This specific frill shark was derived from a sighting in 2007 when the nearly dead shark came to the surface, was captured, and subsequently died shortly after. This shark’s life was documented for its mysterious qualities and was treated without care or aid. Through streaming AV sites such as YouTube, our society has a vast visual library of practically anything, including this footage. Indeed, from Intense confessions to unimportant wisecracks, we collectively can experience confrontation and also disseminate it at an instant. The effect of the technology in YouTube demonstrates the blurred boundaries between reverence and detritus. This is a duality within the freedom of expression and the moral leeway that is entailed within our culture.

Because of YouTube’s abyss of insidious content, is it possible that it could arrest someone’s development? Where streaming footage of scientific breakthroughs go practically unseen and the word "fart" is tagged in over 70,000 videos, we as a society have inadvertently chosen what is more important. The footage of the frill shark is fascinating but becomes overshadowed by the impermanence of how it is viewed. Our obsession for immediacy stems from a need for short-term, up-to-date news and detached reality in sound bites for short attention spans. The frill shark becomes another blip on our fifteen minutes of fame cultural radar, a
commercial break from the constant pop newsreel. Not unlike the casual way we acknowledge or overlook the transition to adulthood.

In *Rite of Anxiety: Carcharodon carcharias Fort* (Fig. 1.4), an immense great white shark’s head is presented on top of a scaffold structure viewed from a low perspective. Acting as a place equal in both youthful recreation and pop culture dread, the fort’s function is to confuse the viewer. The amount of saturated color within the structure is only matched by the psychological tension of being in the mouth of this most feared creature. Upon entry, the viewer is confronted with abjection and adventure. The stylized intricate marks within the shark’s head are meant to sugar coat the shark’s menace and to entice onlookers to venture into the structure. The great white shark represents caution and sensation because of its societal influence on pop culture. Viewing *JAWS* at a young age is an obvious point of origin for this fear, but the main inspiration for depicting sharks within my work derives from re-occurring dreams throughout my childhood of battling great white sharks and never coming out alive. The image of a great white shark is embedded as a sensational object within pop culture. Our society has appropriated the character and image of a shark as terrible and fearful, while in actuality, this fish is like most others with a hungry belly. The great white shark shows us the powerful effect a mediated image can have on a society, let alone my dreams.

After creating these absurd structural works, it became important for me to imagine and configure the inhabitants of these structures. Having the desire to push the printed image outside of its embossed intaglio border, it became evident that the imagery should concentrate on object and form as well. This endeavor consequently led to the destruction of the printed structures so that they could be reconfigured and transformed into the tribespersons’ costume. In *Inadequate Inhabitors Interacting* (Fig. 1.5), the construction of these figures derives from collage and
sampling. I am drawn to these aesthetics because of their abilities to deconstruct, replicate, and recontextualize. It is important to the integrity of the structures that these inhabitants resemble their home, a structure that was equally as absurd as what later became adorned outfits. Sampling and collaging my own prints became the answer to this problem. Their costumes are a conceptual response to the MTV Generation that I am a part of. From handling two remotes to the TV of my youth to two online social networking sites of my young adult life, these outlets have shaped my generation’s identity. The barrage of ragged, fuzzy analog textures and abstract pixilated forms of detritus that embody these costumes are characteristics of what I was exposed to through my generation’s history. Sampling grew out of this experience and became part of my studio practice.

The tribespersons are portrayed clad in spandex for paradoxical purposes. Caught between the suspension of belief inherent in theatre and the undeniable adherence of the material to the detailed shape of the figure, the under garment is juxtaposed between reality and truth. Spandex covers everything yet hides nothing and is completely synthetic. It is proud of its insincerity, and in this case, costumes my generational identity. Raised on cable television, I believe our collective sense of reality is blurred between fact and fiction. This is in direct correlation with my sense of instability, and how I have constructed the notion of arrested development. How is it that I can find admiration for ABC’s T.G.I.F and the History Channel at the same time? This broad range of taste is in direct correlation to the inhabitants of my constructed world and their androgynous appearances. They are trying to interact with each other but fail to arrive at a connecting point of mutual communication and stability. Through various tools of communication these *inhabitants* fail to arrive at any substantial exchange. They reside, lost in their awkward interactions and pre-occupied with their own distractions in a hybrid tribal / technological world. A loving embrace and an ego driven self-masturbatory act show the spectrum of reactions from these
characters. The emotions behind their eyes are subtle, and they are not able to look directly at one another. They truly are disconnected, regardless of their distance/proximity to each other.

I am interested in objects from American culture that are relevant to my personal history. Through the use of appropriation and re-contextualization I establish my own position while creating a dialogue with culture at large. I took inspiration from historical and contemporary artists who worked in similar aesthetics. Artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Christian Marclay, and Richard Prince are all well identified for their use of appropriation. Prince’s Celebrities series resonated with me because of his unique ability to authenticate celebrity signatures in conjunction with their glossy photographs. Rauschenberg’s Erased De Kooning and Duchamp’s L.H.O.O.Q. re-contextualize an object / work of art and dispel sacredness and use destruction as a form of creation. Marclay’s sound compositions and sculptural objects are influential for his use of the album cover and his deconstructive / reconstructive process in creating his sound works. Contemporary musical acts such as Black Dice sparked aesthetic interest for me with their use of de-constructed audio, creating a visceral and chaotic experience through effects, looping, and sampling.

Where the printed matter of my work is self-derived, my audio and video work is completely appropriated. I re-contextualize and disfigure particular and personal pop culture artifacts to coincide with my printed work. The themes and ideas concentrated within the audio and video works derive from my curiosity and concern in my views of growing up, what that entails, and how that is accomplished.

In Ideal Youth Rendered Pointless (HI HONEY / GROWN UP) (Fig. 1.6, 1.7), a diptych comprised of audiocassette tape cases built on top of each other to form a phrase are presented to the viewer. Each of the assemblages displays an influential album from my youth that I
recontextualize to conceptually depict a lack of transformation to adulthood. *HI HONEY* for instance reveals The Beach Boys’ opus *Pet Sounds*, an iconic summer love soundtrack while *GROWN UP* displays The Beastie Boys’ iconic *License to Ill*, an ultimate collection of party anthems.

These phrases, juxtaposed with the aforementioned album covers are devised to present the viewer with questions regarding image as text and text as image. *HI HONEY* for instance presents the viewer with 118 separate images of men feeding and tenderly caring for another entity (in this case, pet goats). These images personally represent the responsibility of caring for another and the rituals that follow. Implicit is the honesty and sincerity for the individual to speak the phrase "Hi Honey". Though these events are noble, they are not instantaneous, unlike The Beach Boy’s portrayed idealized and perfected scenarios of young love. This notion leads the viewer to realize that this way of thinking is un-rational and could foster arrested development. *GROWN UP* on the other hand gives the viewer a disconcerting repetition with a perpetual abundance of chaos and untimely doom as airplanes fall out of the sky onto the ground plain headfirst. These 160 cassettes that form the text together leaves the viewer to contemplate the act of growing up and the possible shortcomings (or their lack) to the path of adulthood. The repeated image underscores the numerous attempts of flight and soar to the aftermath of the fall and crash. Could this be an example of the multitude of any generation’s plight? *Ideal Youth Rendered Pointless (HI HONEY / GROWN UP)* speaks as a collective on a pessimistic and optimistic level for any generation, all while alluding to the fact that these ideal lifestyles only provide dead ends and keep one’s mindset underdeveloped, unable to cope with adulthood and responsibilities.

An individual who gives up the profane symbolizes the transformation in certain cultures. In these cultures, the theology of adulthood is to move away from ignorance and to become one with
a deity. In the Kwakiutl culture of northern Vancouver Island, the achievement of mental transcendence is accomplished by the act of falling into a trance through the repetition of music and dance. This practice calls to mind the 1980/90’s trend of rave parties. Through the repetition of electronic drumbeats, subtle shifts, and intense crescendos, they too provide rhythmic transcendence to a higher mental state (there’s even a sub-genre of techno called “trance”). This pairing inspired personal investigations into creating audio assemblages with layering and concepts that could mimic the purposes of tribal transcendence yet be derived from an actual source. An aesthetic duality of sincerity and insincerity was of great interest to me as a strategy. An example of this would be taking and modifying pop music to ambient, droning, incoherent rhythmic sound collages. The dissection of pop song structures led way to the creation of new structures that I deemed more interesting than that of the original. Hearing a repeated portion of audio and discovering its rhythmic qualities became a transcendent ritual for me in the process of creating my audio collages.

In *Rite of Empathy: I Sympathize With You When I Say I Miss My Dog Too* (Fig. 1.8), I took elements from Paris Hilton’s self titled album to create a edition of 50 audiocassette tapes and recorded an audio collage in response to her seeming lack of transformation from her time in jail. The drone of the audio is matched by the resilience of her unaltered self. The media and general public revere Hilton as complete pop detritus. We view Hilton through a filter of celebrity fiction, as the reality of celebrity life is never truly depicted. Though we view the gamut of emotions from such celebrities, we see only what the camera sees. Through chaotic unsyncopated rhythms and tempo-altered dismal melodies, a reconstruction of her music is transformed to a dispirited and dismal anarchistic mess. I can relate to her having missed her Chihuahua while in jail and I sympathize and playfully deconstruct her persona by participating in the media she has produced. The design
of the piece was created in the obsolete format of the audiocassette to emphasize the analog versus digital form of recording. The audiocassette had a helpful impact in the 1980’s due to DYI underground music. With Hilton’s album in mind, the audiocassette edition I employ is in contrast to the mass-produced and meticulously researched major label music business that issued her album.

*Rite of Reinvention: Oh I Forgot I’m Not Married* (Fig. 1.9) is a piece of personal culture involving a re-edited clip from Hollywood’s “Batman Returns.” This clip depicts actress Michelle Pfeiffer’s character Selena returning home after a bad day. As her emotional state unwinds, Selena escalates into a transformational chaos. The video clips in the piece are layered with a plethora of samples and loops of audio derived from the *Super Mario Brothers* videogame franchise. This pairing of audio and video results in a chaotic synergy depicting a demolishing act of youthful ideals and pasts.

Selena’s slow building transition to madness is matched by the crescendo of layered audio to enforce the tension. This buildup culminates in her inner most fear of letting go. The desire to reinvent and transform herself from an over-aged youth into a new self is evident within the film. She transcends from powerless to powerful. The audio portion of this piece is influenced by my youthful videogame vigor (my generation having become an integral target market for the $9.5 billion videogame industry). The journey of these simple, cute, and fun sounds rotate out of control from simple 8-bit blips to bellowing, gnashing swells of distortion. The audio hearkens to 1980 /90’s youth culture and how it has been commodified through intricate layering and buildup of additional effects. Much like the protagonist in the video, the audio results in a downward spiral, becoming barely recognizable to its former self.
Selena leaves nothing intact in her destructive path throughout her apartment. Even her specifically arranged stuffed animals and her obsessively worn X-Large kitty cat nightshirt. She begins to sew a glove and creates a ring from pieces of her destroyed apartment to begin her frantic reinvention. This action shows the indecisiveness of her transformation. Selena’s hesitation to her transformation though is only as short as her sanity. She seals her decision with a ring, an icon for engagement/marriage. This chain of events pushes a serious question: is the rite of marriage a symbol for being grown-up? This question leads the viewer to further investigate Selena’s madness and her true reasons for it. Her act of destruction to end in a fantasy-induced reality is detrimental. For this ideal circumstance to come true at such an obsessive level would only push her mentality further into youth. The video is meant to contextualize Selena’s willingness to abandon her past life while still holding onto her innermost desires; she wants to hold onto her youth, yet wishes to be grown-up. She cannot change what she cannot control.

When viewing this film as a child, I couldn’t help but be completely engrossed in Selena’s act of anarchy. Seeing someone self-destruct in less than three minutes posed questions for me forcing me to re-evaluate my level of importance and how I really felt about my surroundings. In revisiting the footage, I now view it as a ritual of my transformation, a reinvention of the psyche, and a statement on how banality, routine, and repetition evolve into a self-realization that ultimately alter life’s path. Selena’s past has become her biggest downfall, where the destruction of it is in direct linkage to her desire to abolish her former self. Selena finally breaks free of the protective self-inflicted borders she has put up for herself. Although her emotions run the gamut throughout the video, she wear a joyous smile when she kills the true symbol of her former identity, the stuffed animal.
These works have all lead me to a point that my sense of arrested development within contemporary culture is indeed predicated on convoluted understandings and misinterpretation fostered by pop culture and the media. I sampled respected imagery of my youth to my own artwork to create a personal mythology about transcending to adulthood, yet feel that the results only reinstated my initial understanding and responsibility of adulthood, and my unwillingness to age or be mature. I revere the icons of my youth and deem them important within my own contemporary context, regardless of age or how they could reside as kitsch. Everyone from my generation knows what and who The Mario Bros. and Beastie Boys are, yet do not share the exact personal feelings and experiences I had with them. To find one’s identity while being immersed in pop culture is perplexing. How does one feel about youth-hood being promulgated by corporate entities? Where I do not consider this notion good or bad, I view it indeed something that will only need time and further investigations, which I suppose is a rite of passage in and of itself. I look forward to my future studio practice and navigating through sampled and appropriated imagery to create work that not only informs my current stage in life, but my future outlooks and overall growth.
Figure 1.1  
*Rite of Self Worth: Siiruulian Phantele Hut (I Love You Max Rebo)*

Intaglio, Drypoint

12” X 12”

2008
Figure 1.2

*Rite of Death: Rhincodon typus Drum Room* (detail)

Intaglio, Hardground Etching, Aquatint, Drypoint

11 5/8" X 23 5/8"

2008
Figure 1.3

*Rite of Discovery: Chlamydoselachus anguineus Lean-to*

Intaglio, Drypoint

12” X 12”

2008
Figure 1.4

*Rite of Anxiety: Carcharodon carcharias Fort*

Graphite, Gouache, Acrylic

11” X 15”

2008
Figure 1.5

*Inadequate Inhabiters Interacting* (Detail)

Collaged Intaglio Prints

Size of Figures Varies, 4” X 8” Each

2008-2009
Figure 1.6

*Ideal Youth Rendered Pointless (HI HONEY)*

Audio Cassette Cases, Paper

Size Varies

2008
Figure 1.7

*Ideal Youth Rendered Pointless (GROWN UP)*

Audio Cassette Cases, Paper

Size Varies

2008
Figure 1.8

*Rite of Empathy: I Sympathize With You When I Say I Miss My Dog Too*

Fifty yellow audio cassettes containing ten minutes per side w/ plastic cases, Audio cassette player

Size Varies

2008-2009
Figure 1.9

*Rite of Reinvention: Oh I Forgot I'm Not Married*

DVD, DVD Player, TV, He-Man Blanket

Size Varies

2009