

Michelle Foot

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IP Section 5

Ads are Best When They are Simply Stories Well Told

The EPOCH Exhibit opened on a Friday night in Ann Arbor, MI. I was going to observe a piece of work by Michelle Foot, a student I have been critiquing for several years now. A philosophical artist, she always tries to innovate new philosophical ideas when thinking about the restraints between advertising and art. As I walked into Slusser Gallery in the School of Art and Design building I saw the white walls of a traditional gallery in stark contrast with the two six foot by four foot framed photo collages. Walking towards them, I immediately notice one image of Time Square in New York City and the other with a vague recollection of Time Square. Titled "Ad(d) Yourself", the collage was black and white, reminiscent of Time Square only with a dreary, gray overtone, as if you could feel the cold winter day in Michigan. From corner to corner of the work edges could be seen at each section of the collage cut in straight lines. Tiled together they created six buildings: two tall skyscrapers similar to New York City's to the right, a building with a rounded corner facing the viewer in the center, and two smaller buildings on the left. Several different colors invaded the sky making me feel as though the sad weather drags on in this world. The second collage, built around a river of colors, lifts my spirit from the coldness. It has the same edginess from corner to corner but

with more complication. Colorful advertisements line the buildings, painting each walkway with continuous eye candy. Cuts in the photograph breakup each buildings personality and color, which suggest the controversy of ads only being wanted by half the population. Part of the collage contains a dark night with radiant bright lights while the left part of it fills with daylight where people roam the streets covered in sunshine. I want to be lost in this world of action and excitement through day and night as I stare at it. Looking closer at the black and white collage in comparison to the color collage of Times Square, I realized something. More than the lack of color, these pieces are about a portion of New York City seen in a new and interesting way. Comparing these two collages I have come to realize that through the lack of advertising in one and its prominence in the other, as well as my knowledge of her past work, she must be commenting on advertising in these cities. They're about our culture and what it would be like without advertising. These montages need to be digested within two separate categories Foot addresses: concept, namingly an advertisers perspective and that of an artists, and craftsmanship.

Seen and built in a new way, both collages are crafted with intense detail and prominence of process. Instead of creating this collage digitally, Michelle Foot took the time to cut the individual pieces of the collage and place them together to create an illusionistic space; one that shows depth, energy and beauty. Not normal collages, these works are well-crafted pieces that have obviously been planned. Each image combined to create the collages has been strategically placed to form two slightly hodgepodge photographs of Time Square. My first instinct is to attempt to

understand why the colorless collage seems to be inferior to the color one. The desaturation suggests dullness or lack of interest. It also contains buildings that are vastly different than those of the colorless one. Reading Michelle Foot's artist statement I found out the buildings of colorless one come from Detroit. The artist statement clarifies that this work comments on advertising as I had implied, and its need in our culture. The artist statement clarifies this work as both part advertising and part art. They are works of art not only because of their location in an art gallery but also because of their concept and craftsmanship.

Using my artist's perspective I focus on the concept, the craftsmanship and the ability to combine the two to get the message to the audience through the work. Concept is important in work because it is what pulls the viewer into the piece after initial contact. The mystery and idea behind the piece creates the depth and meaning that connect the viewer to the work to create a reaction. Craftsmanship shows the amount of effort put into the work and ultimately gives it prestige. A well-crafted work is well respected. For example, Andy Warhol has craftsmanship and concept in his works. He depicts both, through the intensity of his paintings and silkscreen prints. He obviously comments on advertising with his well-crafted artwork of things such as Campbell's soup cans. He created each one of his hand-painted Campbell's soups to look identical on a wall. Once you take a step closer however, you see each has its own characteristics of line weight and shadowing proving the time Warhol spent to complete each painting by hand. His work takes the mundane can of soup he ate every day for lunch and uses its graphics and identity to create a series of paintings that transform the ordinary object through

stylization and repetition. Each image combines with one another cohesively, similar to Foot's work, through its medium and subject matter. (Stiles)

The detail in craftsmanship is similar in both Warhol and Foot because of their attention to stylization and repetition, enhancing the importance of concept and graphic quality. Foot's two different collages function in parallel, yet different worlds, because of the style of their photographic cropping, the placement of the images, the printing on luster paper, the framing and their gallery location. Foot clearly placed each image next to one another to create dimensionality within the photographs. She used the artist's craft of photography as well as collage to take these specific, well-chosen images a step further and combine them into a tiled mosaic.

It is obvious craftsmanship is important to her, but concept is equally, if not more important to her work. Cities have a personality based on their buildings and architecture and not just their advertisements. Foot's "Ad(d) Yourself" contains even more personality, more details, charm and interest. Advertisements such as the videos playing on billboards in New York City add color to the landscape of the city. To prove the necessity of this world, the fact that 600 million tourists visit time square every year. Time Square houses the epitome of advertising because it's where advertising is worshiped, where it was born, and where it's always on display for the world to see. Time Square's the peak of the advertising world mostly because it's the home of the Ad Man. The Manhattan skyscrapers represent the Ad Men who brought the importance of advertising products to life. This is why Foot choose Time

Square, and New York City, to represent advertising's importance, because it's the homeland of modern creativity in America.

Creativity proves vastly important in America, not only through innovation but creativity as of artists such as David Hockney as well. A work definitely inspired by David Hockney, Michelle Foot captures the essence of both cities in her work. Foot uses a similar style to David Hockney. He creates fantasy through photo collage, making you believe objects such as his chair or people such as his "old woman" could exist in a parallel universe, filled with imagination and obscurities based on observations in his every day life. He uses a scientifically proven collage technique with straight cut rectangular images built in modular sections to activate the saccade movements of the human eye, or the eye's natural ability to quickly compare images side by side. Foot uses the same technique to enhance the viewer's ability to compare not only the entire collage but pieces of them as well, generating the optimum capacity for her viewers to choose between a fantasy world filled with advertising and one void of it. Foot's illusionistic spaces encourage people to get lost in a world of their choice, whether they choose one with or without advertising is up to them. (Stiles)

Unfortunately, the real world beckons and it does not give a choice, instead it only criticizes the need for advertising in our culture. Michelle shows a truly loving relationship with these cities through her craftsmanship. She shows her love of the city of Detroit through her dedication to that single collage. She takes the time to strategically place each image to create the exact right scene. Knowing Foot's from the suburbs of Detroit, her attention to detail in the collage of Detroit shows her

positive relationship with the city. She specifically went down to the city to photograph it and give the city the attention it deserves when she could have chosen a different city to relate New York too. To choose Detroit out of all the cities to relate to New York, the city that never sleeps, populated with white-collar inventors, she makes a rather large and loving statement for Detroit. Foot comments on Detroit's poverty; however the way she carefully constructs the Time Square look alike from buildings in Detroit suggesting they have the power to be equal. After studying her work for the last couple years, I know she believes advertising can come to Detroit's rescue and save it from the poverty and troubles it has now, possibly bringing it to the same appreciation level as New York City.

Foot also comments on advertisements ability to bolster capitalism. Detroit's a city that has gone through some devastating problems in the past few decades. Although most of it has not been related to their lack of advertisements, they could possibly prosper more if the city was able to get their story heard through advertisements. The city could receive money as New York City does with their ads. One example that proves this theory Foot's promoting: the recent Chrysler commercial that displayed Detroit's beauty, through a small tour of the city, the old tiger stadium, Fox Theater, and Hart Plaza. The commercial provides reasons why people should visit Detroit. Although this commercial's about selling cars, it puts so much emphasis on the city the commercial creates a city filled with importance and necessity. It creates an atmosphere of love instead of trying to sell a product, similar to Foot's work. It has over seven million views on YouTube and was the number one

Googled item the day after it aired. It is ironic that both were published at similar times because of their relationship to the importance of noticing the city of Detroit.

Although Detroit had made strides towards improvement, advertising has become a fiercely competitive world. A harsh, get run over by a train type of industry where many people get chewed up and spit out for their ideas every year. What Michelle Foot has taken on, namingly, commenting on the advertising industry, especially in a positive way, proves even more challenging. For years humanitarians, traditionalists, and I'm sure architects (such as the ones who designed the buildings of Time Square) have been arguing about the need for less advertising. Douglas Rushcoff for example, in his movie *Persuaders*, describes advertising as "clutter to our world, consuming our lives and our culture." (Rushcoff) For Michelle to take an opposite seat to this vast group, I commend her. Advertisements are meant to immediately grab the viewer's attention, whether with a higher decibel level in commercials, which I agree can be annoying, or bright graphic design. The "Adless World" collage lack this ability to stand out, more then the "World of Ads" does because of its obvious saturation. Foot's size of her work shows an attempt to make up for the deficiency of intense color or graphic. This tactic certainly has strength in a gallery when many works are of such a smaller scale. The second tactic of advertising, however is to pull the viewer in after attracting their attention. Foot grasps this idea well, she has so much detail and imagery in her collage its hard to walk by and not get pulled in.

In a gallery a work's need to "grasp your attention immediately" the way advertisements do is less important because most people who go to galleries are

there for their interest in art. Foot's collages create worlds to get lost in. If I had an entire day to spare I would sit in Slusser Gallery and get lost walking the blocks of both cities imagining what life would be like with and without advertisements in our cities.

Work Cited

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Stiles, Kristine, and Peter Howard Selz. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. Berkeley: University of California, 1996. Print.





