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Self- Monitoring

For my senior integrative project, it was very important to me to be able to work with personal material, because I feel that the expression of personal matters results in more compelling works. In music, fine art, design, and every other form of art that exists, I always feel as though I'm better able to connect with the artist as well as the artwork itself when there is an emotional component involved with the discussed topic. I also felt a compulsion to have my senior project be a culmination of my experience over the past four years of college, both academically, and socially. For this reason, I sat down and thought in depth about ways that my experience in college, in the School of Art and Design, and in the city of Ann Arbor was unique. As a student whose personal values and traditional thinking differ greatly from his surroundings, I feel that my project produces an interesting semi-biographic, narrative about the ways that we as people attempt to fit in, but can never be exactly the same as the "majority" that we picture in our minds.

I was raised in a largely conservative town, and a conservative household. When I moved to Ann Arbor in order to attend the University of Michigan, where liberal thinking and political values are prevalent, the radical shift in thinking was quite a shock for me. I found it interesting to hear opinions and thoughts that were in opposition to most others that I had commonly heard in my hometown, but I felt that at times, because I was not aligned with the majority, it was difficult for me to voice my own opinion. I felt that by stating a thought or opinion that was contrary to the thoughts of most other people, I might upset the masses or offend someone that I had not intended to offend. Because of this fear of upsetting the balance, and being viewed as strange or misinformed, I found that I began to censor myself, and not interject my opinion in situations where I felt that it would not be welcomed. As a new person in a new town, with not many friends to speak of, I wanted to fit in, while also finding friends who would accept me for me, which became complicated when I did not normally voice my opinion.

When reflecting upon my time and experience in Ann Arbor as a person who came from a place of vastly different thinking, I began to feel that it would be interesting to illustrate the process of censoring oneself based on the fear of being rejected or shunned by others. Since much of what I wanted to express had bearings in the field of psychology, I decided to take a psychology class, and went quite in depth in the study of social and behavioral psychology. During my study of social psychology I came across a term that really encompassed almost everything that I had wanted to express in my senior project. The concept of "self- monitoring" is a measurable occurrence in psychology that is defined, as changing ones own attitudes or behavior based on the way that one expects to be perceived by others. As stated, this is a measured, and empirically supported concept, measured on a scale from low self-monitoring to high self-monitoring. High self-monitors are people whose behavior and attitudes displayed in public don't accurately display their true thoughts and feelings, whereas low self- monitors tend to be relatively straightforward, and display their true thoughts and feelings in public.

After much research and time, I felt that I had finally put a name to the concept that I was looking to explore in my senior project, and it continues to inform my work. Based on the concept of self-monitoring I have decided to take instances from my own life, where I monitor myself because I fear not being accepted by a group of people who are different from me, and graphically illustrate those instances, sharing them with others so that they might also reflect upon the ways that they monitor themselves. In each image, I am pictured in the foreground amongst a crowd of silhouettes. The crowd in the background is represented by silhouettes in order to graphically display a difference between the crowd and myself. I also feel that the use of silhouettes helps to generalize the figures in the background, not necessarily representing a specific person, but rather a group of people. The silhouettes also help to create a comparison between the masses and myself, which is really what self-monitoring is about.

Throughout the series I am depicted in four different outfits, attempting to display the fact that through self-monitoring, I almost create complete separate versions of myself that are only displayed when I feel it is appropriate, and when in the correct company, censoring the parts of me that I feel will not be accepted. The multiple hands work as a tool to show the metaphorical competition between the separate versions of me that I create with self-monitoring. In each image one version of myself is depicted entirely in the foreground and hands come from behind the figure, shutting the mouth of the front figure and stopping him from speaking. These hands are meant to be the hands of the other competing versions of me that wish to prevent any “unacceptable” thoughts from escaping the front figures mouth. The expressive quality of the hands also allows for a greater amount of emotion to be depicted, because they supplement the emotion seen in the facial expressions. This is a metaphorical representation of the feeling I have, when I stop myself from speaking or acting as a result of self-monitoring. The process of creating this work is very therapeutic for me. It allows me to be able to externalize emotions that I have kept bottled, up expressing them in a form of art that I have a great love for.

All of my illustrations begin as physical, hand drawings and are then imported into the computer and further worked with digital software. This is very rewarding experience for me, because I feel an intimate relationship between my work and myself by psychically laying down the marks on the paper. This works to increase the intimacy of my work, by sharing very personal information the audience, rendered in a very personal medium. Drawing is also a medium that I have worked with since childhood, and have loved ever since. Incorporating digital art into the work allows me to take a medium that I have had many years of experience with, and combine it with a medium that was relatively foreign to me prior to college. This parallels my concept, because in the same way that I have feel as though I monitor myself as a result of being different from my environment due to my upbringing, the two mediums also work to create a comparison of past and present.

For the presentation of my work, I felt that it would be best to have multiple versions of each physical image, in order to emphasize the multiplicity of the concept. Since there are four versions of me depicted in the work, I thought that

having four copies of each image would be a good way to repeat this number, and let the audience know that the presentation was thought out and not haphazard or random. I created four rows of work that were displayed in dim lighting on the gallery walls, and the work took up a space of approximately six feet long and three feet high. All four rows displayed a different arrangement of my nine images, which was intended to show that this is an ongoing and ever changing process. Each image was 10" x 6.8", which is a proportional enlargement of the dimensions from my IP postcard, and I felt that this size was large enough to see at a distance, but still small enough that the viewer was required to get in close and see the detail, making the exchange between the viewer and myself more intimate. Instead of having all of the images printed out as one large poster, I decided that it would be best to print each image individually and pin it up on the wall. Taking the time to pin up each image individually was meant to show viewers that this is a personal and important matter to me. I wanted to give the feel of the viewers seeing my work on the wall of my personal studio, rather than framing the work and putting it behind glass, formalizing the relationship between the audience and me.

Outside of my work being informed by the psychological concepts, there are artists that have given me inspiration and have informed my work. Whenever I have doubts or questions about how to accurately present my ideas in a creative method, I find it helpful to consult of these artists and their work. One artist that I have found to be inspiring is Michal Rovner, who has done multiple works with silhouettes, similar to the ones that are included in my own work. My favorite piece by Rovner is titled *Culture Plate*, which pictures very miniaturized silhouettes of people walking around in what looks like a Petri dish. From a distance, one assumes that one is looking at bacteria or amoebas, but upon closer review it is apparent that they are in fact human forms. I feel that this is relevant to my own work, because it successfully illustrates the masses as anonymous and undefined, but present. Another artist that works very successfully with silhouette forms is Kara Walker. I find Walker's work to be very inspiring, because she conveys such great detail and emotion only with the outline of the human form. Also the graphic quality of Walker's work is just phenomenal, and I appreciate it greatly. I would like to think that in my own work, I have created a similar level of detail in my use of silhouette. Each one of my own works depicts a different group of people in the background as silhouette and I feel that attention to the graphic detail of each silhouette has allowed me to accurately show various groups of people using only contour.

Other artists that I admire and draw inspiration from include T. Hart Benton, and Barbara Kruger. Even though, Benton is a painter, which is different from my own work, he has a very illustrative, and somewhat surreal way of representing people and crowds. I would very much like to incorporate some of the surreal and illustrative qualities of Benton's paintings into my own work. In the final presentation of my work, I think that the surreal quality that I was seeking was upheld. Each image includes self-portraiture, and seeing the multiple faces of me coupled with the surreal use of more than two hands really did convey a feeling of surrealism in my opinion. Barbara Kruger's graphic design work is also very inspirational to me, because she does a lot of work with facial expressions, and hands, and many are in black and white. I feel that many of Kruger's ads convey a

great amount of emotion while only incorporating a small portion of the body, or just a simple phrase, and I would say that by using elements of Kruger's minimalist approach to displaying emotion, my work ended up being more powerful. Using only facial expression and hand gestures to describe a concept as complicated as self-monitoring was not easy, but I think that Kruger's influence allowed me to create a higher grade of work than would have been otherwise possible.

Throughout this year, I would say that the integrative project has been the most challenging, while also the most rewarding course that I have taken at the University of Michigan. Through the process of researching my concept this year, I have gained an incredible amount of knowledge about myself, as well as been informed by many topics that were previously foreign to me. Working through multiple iterations of my project, though very stressful at times, has also been a great experience. Most classes require the completion of approximately three projects in a semester, which doesn't leave much room for revision. Being able to focus on one concept all year long, and to squeeze out as much meaning and expression as possible is an experience that will surely prove useful in all areas of life. During the opening night of the senior show I was extremely proud to watch the viewers look at my work and discuss the concept of self-monitoring and compare ways that it has and does affect them. I would say that I would be interested in doing continued research on this concept and will likely produce more work based around it as well.

References

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