

Introduction

“Derelict Dandy” is an abstract installation merging painting, sculpture, and sonic performance, into one mythic-absurdist space. To fully understand the exhibition one must consider this short backstory:

The character, Derelict Dandy is a persona in the form of a “*mythic being*” living on the utopian supercontinent of Pangea. In Pangea, after industrialization, after Henry Ford, the continents began to drift away from each other in an attempt to drown out the greed of humans. Before industrialization, all humans had long noses and spent their waking moments in cathartic creation and questioning. As industrialization occurred noses shrank and human hierarchies began to form, determined by nose length: the longer the nose the lower the class. The character Derelict Dandy has a very long pinocchio nose which sentences him to a life of of hard labor and suffering in order to allow the world of the snub nosed people to function and watch television. He and his accomplice, the similarly ensconced collaborator Sassy Pollock decide they will no longer do hard labor, they instead work to create art and to question their role in society.

Derelict, Sassy and their ensemble of long nosed misfits populate an installation of paintings, plaster sculptures, modified electronic detritus, and photographs, performing together for the duration of the exhibition. The ensemble takes on tasks ranging from producing photographs to singing to dancing, to reading manifestos and histories.

Creating my artwork within the lens of a persona and fictional space based in reality allows me to engage with questions of identity and its construction, specifically privilege, masculinity, and processes of socialization. As a white male my identity in the United States (and much of the western world) grants me access to power and is often the face of the oppressors in our patriarchal society. My work in this thesis year has been to ruminate on that, to look at my own personal history and anxieties using what I find as fuel to create a ritualistic performance that will attempt to heal myself, and in the process perhaps reach out to those who share my identity and heal them as well. I have gone through many workflows and characters trying to find the right fit for myself and find a truly healing shaman who can lead my final

performance and create my work. Overall, I am interested in creating images using paint, photos, and video to be paired with soundtracks to create visceral feelings within my audience on contemporary subjects ranging from political to environmental to personal. By doing so I am upholding a pluralistic system of making, without borders, which, when viewed as ritual, becomes a means to delve inside one's self to learn about the world we inhabit.

Contextual Discussion

The idea of the mythic role of the artist in modern western society, in the post war period arrives with the writings of Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. In his essay "The American Action Painters" (1952) Rosenberg establishes the painting as "an arena in which to act" rather than a pictorial plane (ROSENBERG). These theoreticians established the solo, 'abstract expressionist' painter, often drunk, often male, often DeKooning, as the highest and most sought after of all artists. They championed painting and its mythic creation over the meaning of the work in many instances. Western artists since have grappled with this role and its meanings. Through the means of satire, artists have since taken on this idea which has become a pillar of the commodity driven art world. Adrian Piper took on the idea in 1973 in her performance "*Mythic Being*," artists such as the Guerrilla Girls created signage that they posted around New York City in the 1980s asking why women were not represented in the art world as mythic artists, Paul Mccarthy satirized the process of painters like Willem De Kooning in his video performance, "*The Painter*" in 1995.

My character, the Dandy comes out of a history of "*artists as clowns*," exemplified by artists such as Pat Oleszko, and taken up directly in Bruce Nauman's "*Clown Torture 1987*." The use of live theatre and alluding to ritual to dispel borders within art and the world comes from the writings of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and his trouble making theatre group, "*La Pocha Nostra*." Gómez-Peña's

writings and manifestos and his ideas around the erasure of borders have become extremely important to the way I view art and living. The cinematographic style of my documentation, as well as the writing I did about my origins is a nod to the work of the director Harmony Korine, notably his films “Julien Donkey Boy” (1999) and “Trash Humpers” (2009) and the ethos of filmmaking known as Dogme 95 started by Lars Von Trier. Dogme 95 is a manifesto which seeks to create a more truthful film (DOGME). I employed pieces of their “Vow of Chastity” while collecting footage as Derelict Dandy to create a more realistic look and a “*found in a dumpster*” feel to the video.

My installation would also not be possible without the work done by artists within the Mission Movement, including Barry Mcgee, Margaret Kilgallen, Ed Templeton, and Chris Johanson, whose populist, from the street sensibilities and use of thrifted frames I have adopted. Mcgee, Kilgallen, and Johanson employ a wandering sensibility in their drawings depicting urban life, each of their respective styles merge aspects of drawing, illustration and painting into large scale gallery installations. Ed Templeton’s snapshots document teenage misfits and his relationship with his wife Deanna Templeton displaying large clusters of framed photographs within a painted gallery space. All of the Mission Movement artists were associated with skateboarding directly (Ed Templeton is a pro skater and owner of Toy Machine) or indirectly. Skateboarding in general has also been a huge influence on my work, from its use of DIY attitudes, and the seek and “destroy” (or skate to pieces) attitude that one can find in most parking lot dwelling adolescent skaters.

Methodology

My methodology for creating this work has been one of rituals and exploratory, often absurd performances. I began the first semester with filming installments for a meandering, “hero’s journey” tale centering around a character named Frank. I created an original score for the scenes I had filmed over the

semester, which include Frank rambling through a wide open desert, being rubbed down by pink gluttons on the banks of the Huron river with chicken wings, and consorting with an eccentric existentialist street preacher. After doing that work and presenting it for a mid-way review I found myself unable to continue. I had began taking literature classes centering on African Literature and colonialism, violence in oil production, and the performance of race during and after the civil rights movement. On the news I couldn't escape the constant run down of the United State's mass shootings, violent Trump rallies, and rhetoric surrounding the 2016 presidential campaigns. These overwhelming and disturbing ideas challenged my identity in such a way that I felt I had to put Frank aside and work on finding myself. I began creating drawings of faces in dripped enamel paint which eventually gave way to the creation of large 7 x 7 foot enamel paintings.

On the weekends when the school was mostly empty I would pack my materials onto a cart and wheel it from my "*studio*," which at this point had become mainly a storage space, up to a room with windows and adequate air flow. In the ventilated space I unpacked my materials, donned a respirator and laid my canvas on the floor, standing over it to drip the enamel paint and draw as it fell onto the canvas. I did not plan the overall design, rather I reacted to my marks and let my mind wander, paying attention to what came up and trying to channel those thoughts into icons contained within the drawing. These icons, oil barrels, disconcerting faces with long noses, nationalism in the suburbs, hangings, cars and trucks, and guns began to form building blocks for a narrative within my head.

Because I could not leave my materials out, and because the enamel paint did not lay flat on itself after it dried, I would have to create the entire painting in one go, often painting for 12-15 hours straight. This long term rumination on myself, my place in the world, and the world itself began to reveal to me the character of Derelict Dandy, a man who creates to escape realities and project new ones.

Escapism has been a huge part of my work flow in general. In my 8x8" studio space I have created several small scale installations and within them recorded performances searching for

contemporary masculinity made in collaboration with my friend Riley Hansen including Derelict Dandy skits, and a western dance that climaxes with a shoot off using our penises as guns. When creating these performances the “now” becomes extremely important as we seek to simultaneously create art and live life. Searching for a place without boundaries, an escape from the monotony of a modern existence, has led directly into the overall installation of Pangea. To expand on the Dandy I have engaged in many performances for video and photos in which friends and I would don costumes I have made for the Derelict Dandy world with large noses, and balaclavas. We would then create documentary style videos of the characters creating art works to be displayed and living in a suburban existence. When displayed the photographs that the characters made and will create a layered world where one sees art making as a ritual, and experimenting as research. For my final installation I sewed a number of balaclavas and assembled an ensemble of Derelict Dandys to lend my exhibition the feel of a surreal masquerade.

Creative Work

Derelict Dandy emerged within me in the form of a costume. Wrapped in a haute-couture pink and blue suit, with a matching balaclava out of which pokes a long nose, and tap shoes, Derelict Dandy is a dandy of the midwest, and should be thought of as “dandy as self portrait.” The modern dandy is about aesthetic accountability and I am bastardizing the motives of the dandy’s aesthetic curation, shifting them from motives of social climbing to motives of interrupting the socializing forces within western society. This reaction to socializing forces and the “Derelict” part of my dandy comes from my own background within skateboarding, D.I.Y. culture, and the midwest’s homey aesthetic. Derelict Dandy’s long nose, and the noses of Pangea can be thought of as an icon, acknowledging that this character, as well as myself carry an enormous amount of privilege that can not be escaped and deeply affects my outlook on the world, by extension arrives in my work in numerable ways. I have photographed this Dandy in situations

ranging from the absurd to the banal to fully fledge out his dual existence in the worlds of Pangea and within what we currently consider reality.

My enamel paintings, “the Industrialization of Pangea” and “Agon” are paintings dealing with the issues of violence, colonization, and industrialization becoming white noise within contemporary life. The icons contained within them form a web of thoughts to which many faces derived from Jean Dubuffet, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and graffiti writers in my hometown of Allen Park react to. I leave the question open whether those are victims or if they are the masses realizing their implication within these large systems.

Within my exhibition is a wall painting laying out the aesthetics of Pangea, on top of which documentation from a number of performances as Derelict Dandy are projected, filtered through the analogue sparkle of VHS. Plaster “barfing gargoyles” are perched throughout my exhibition as guardians of the space so that my ritualistic performance can take place. The ensemble of performers I have arranged and I will occupy this space during the exhibition opening and interact with gallery viewers, reading them manifestos, histories, and singing them songs concerning Pangea.

Conclusion

Creating a mish-mash of real life places and situations and fictional characters and creations I sought to provide guests to my exhibition a chance to depart from their own realities to live in a world free from normal socializations. During the opening I performed a monologue explaining the history of pangea, two songs, and a manifesto re-written from Charles Baudelaire’s essay on Dandyism (BAUDELAIRE). Some folks left my exhibition totally weirded out, others asked why so many phalluses, others grasped the shifts in socialization and the riff on midwestern aesthetics I had been inspired by. I found that folks have a deeply different understanding of the work when they can access me

and talk to me as the character Derelict Dandy, and I will employ that situational performance further in my next works.

I seek to continue my research on socialization, in many contexts and to continue to design happenings that interrupt our daily lives. I have come to the realization that the most important role of the artist is to disrupt what is considered “normal” existence to expose how society is created by totalizing social forces that can be transgressed and reassigned. Derelict Dandy stands to be that artist, and will continue to work towards those aims.

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