

i left the museum with a caravaggio in my pants

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Masculinity

As a young boy I experienced a form of conditioning within a gender specific ideal. This is common among both boys and girls, in the United States. These ideals exist within the dichotomy of masculine and feminine and have been in place since the beginning of time. The symbols of the phallic and uterine are understood within the physical world, but the ideals that are attached to each have evolved over time. The dichotomy has grown and seemingly developed in opposition. Patriarchy and oligarchy have formed our civilized world thus ever separating the two binaries. It was believed in ancient Egyptian culture that in order to continue into the after life you must possess both masculine and feminine ideals, a belief that has become so distant from contemporary masculine culture in America today. My struggle here is to situate the term masculinity. A term that is fluid and ever changing, masculinity varies from person to person, both male and female. When choosing to define the masculinity that I was conditioned in I use the term toxic in tandem. The masculinity that I will define is specific to my experience but allegorical of a larger experience for many boys. For me masculinity began as an ideal passed on from my father, and the subsequent men that came before him. At the time of my birth my father entered into a rigid structure based on militaristic ideals of a sacrificial heroism and martyrdom of emotions. My model became stone cold, emotionless, with the exception of anger and aggression. This model was then translated into sport where

that mentality thrived off of competition and winning. With competition came loss and self-loathing, a perpetual cycle that is found within this form of masculinity where the pinnacle can never be achieved, thus leaving the boy even angrier with himself and others. The pressures in social life are of misogynistic relationships structured by power, and a confided identity to dominance as a social figure that must lead through an imperious attitude sacrificing emotional health and stability. As a wrestler these ideals were ever more perpetuated by the culture of the sport, the coach taking power as a new authoritative figure. My coach preached a win at all cost mentality, a belief that you must fight for everything in your life, and that without his ideals we were failures. Its saddening to believe that those were not his ideals, but ones that he was forced to follow as well, struggling in the same ways as other boys, just never finding a way out. For me the way out was defined by a self awareness through making and thinking, my practice now is in relation to the experiences I had, in order to more fully understand the ideals at play in contemporary culture.

The Athlete: Wrestler, Cowboy, and Artist

When looking at the culture of bad men we must ask what they find so compelling about being bad. I want to look specifically at camaraderie, which can be seen as a way that men enforce a gender binary out of fear of being seen as feminine, but I am interested in unlocking a more precise evaluation from a psychological standpoint. Camaraderie for me could be easier defined as a male-male relationship. This

relationship can be argued to be both sexual or without, but it is hard to dispose of the idea that sexuality plays a large role.

Where do these ideas of camaraderie come from? Scholarly discourse has lead conversations into the idea that these relationships may pertain to sexuality, but they seem to be beyond those limits, as the relationships may never actually be defined as physical. How do we define physical? Young boys touch other boys in sport and physical combat. These violent forms of touch become accepted where sexual touch is not. A line is now formed between what is accepted and what is not, but this line is blurry.

Wrestling began in the ancient world, where the style of dress was nude due to cultural beliefs. Wrestling is still practiced today but a singlet is required. The stories by great thinkers of the ancient world such as Socrates and Plato show it was common cultural practice for older men in the gymnasium to take on mentorship roles with younger men. These mentorships involved sexual physicality. We now look at contemporary wrestling practice and it is safe to say that from my experience it is the exact opposite. So what happened, between these two cultural periods? An evolution took place and I am interested in where it goes from here. Art seems to be the field for this research as it explores all different forms of expression from painting to writing, video and performance. I will inquire into Art History for reference of masculinities potential past in order to understand how my work exist in dialogue.

Early Americans were familiar with ideas through the mode of the written narrative. Chris Packard, in his book *queer cowboys*, looks at 19th century

American literature on the American west. The cowboy is the idealized masculine figure, one boys want to be when they grow up. The cowboy is rugged, a loner, an outlaw, cunning, and queer. Packard argues that because of the cowboy's nature to stay free and individualized from family life, his most valued companion is his fellow cowboy. The relationship between these two men is erotic in a spiritual and possibly sexual way. The relationship of camaraderie between men is common, and accepted among men that identify with a hyper masculine culture. I believe this idea is missing a language that is both accessible and poignant in understanding how to change the minds of bad men. This relationship between men finds lasting ties but has historically shown that it cultivates notions of toxicity, such as the description of the cowboy by Packard of "a Racist agent of U.S. imperialism." It is as though the cowboy archetype has protected the cowboy archetype, the hyper masculine feeds the hyper masculine.

As I continued my research as an artist, I found the cultures within art that were most closely related to the toxic masculinity I found in wrestling. Pollock, Kline, DeKooning, even just the term Action Painting coined by Harold Rosenberg where of the many. This began an immediate confrontation with the ideals that I was presented with as a young wrestler. Within the masculinity of the painter archetype I found a connection, but this connection wasn't fully realized without the help of Paul McCarthy. The post war painter was gritty, an alcoholic, smoked cigarettes, essentially the cowboy of the literary west. The difference was the Painter did not search to love himself in his fellow painter, but the canvas. As two young men may spar and grapple with each other in search of physical touch, the

painter splays and throws his gesture onto the canvas in search for a male intimacy that is lost. Is it found in his actions with the canvas? I would argue that that was just it; the painting of that time was rooted in an existential philosophy where the artist searched for himself or herself in the work; although the her was rarely recognized. Similar to the ideas presented by Packard, the cowboy searched for himself in his fellow cowboy. The works of that period were seen as moving forward from ideas presented by the likes of Kenyon Cox and painting of the late 19th century, but the real move was when Allan Kaprow wrote 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock.' Here Kaprow opened up the exploration of the archetype, both cowboy and painter. Where Kaprow notably points out that the future lies with the paint that missed the canvas, the paint that Pollock shot from a phallic brush that went beyond the canvas and onto the floor. Thus spawning the exploration of a once merely accepted masculine painter, to the excavation and presentation of the falsities these men projected. Kaprow went on to develop the idea of 'Happenings' or performances that explored the intermediate space between art and life. His ideas, for me, begin the road to work that can begin to question the archetype of toxic masculinity.

Contemporary Art: Masculine Critique

Matthew Barney is one of the leading artists working with ideas of masculinity. In his work *Cremaster 3*, is a photograph that was created where Barney is lying on a gynecologist chair with his face covered and a bloody phallic body part on the chair in front. Barney is surrounded by a group of men, and the

artist Richard Serra. Serra can be seen as one of the most macho of artist working with the physicality of man as a tool to create work, definitely a prick. Barney's similarity in work creates a logical connection for his presents. The image then connects to Packard's ideas in the way that Barney is vulnerable, and surrounded by only men. Serra becomes his trusty sidekick, as Barney lay incapacitated, undergoing a procedure that conjures thought surrounding gender, phallic genitalia, and the physical state of being a man. These men look to the camera with an expression of congenial claim to the trauma that Barney is undergoing, because they are all men, fearing how femininity may infiltrate their masculine romance. Packard makes the claim that the erotic relationship present between two cowboys is not the object/ possessive relationship found most common in different sex relationships, but more a reflection of the self. The cowboy sees himself in his fellow cowboy.

As Barney takes an existing power structure as masculinity and complicates to the point of alteration, Paul McCarthy takes on the role of the failure. McCarthy projects the personae of the Masculine Painter as sad, obsolete, a child who will throw a tantrum when what he wants is not received. McCarthy positions his personae as the sad, oh so un-heroic artist, the epitome of failure within the world of art and symbolically an ideal such as masculinity. By completely submitting to the power structure as a failure he builds his own ideals of power. In Hal Foster's book 'Bad New Days', Hal chronicles a possible history of the avant-garde to the present moment. The time line prepossess that the previously held ideals of transgression by the likes of Dada and The Situationist's, fighting the power by its opposition, are dead. The Avant-garde now exists within the postmodern framework of over

conformity. Best represented by such as McCarthy and Performance artist Andy Kauffman. Kauffman suspended the idea of identity resulting in a fluid and free representation of the self, an idea that would pierce the soul of any man who stood firm booted in his ideals of masculinity.

Another important work in this conversation is the 20th centuries performance art master, Marina Abramovic's piece, Rhythm 0. After taking a look at how men have responded to the toxicity of masculinity in art it is important to look at how women have. Marina presented a situation where she embodied the vulnerability that many women have felt when it comes to the toxically abusive culture in some masculine circles. By allowing the audience to use any object from which she presented, on her body. This laser focused the audiences attention to how the body becomes an object, how humans can relinquish compassion and abide by a primordial inquisition. I believe this work to lay the grounding for both performance and how we understand social structures through an act of performance. The space that performance can create challenges what we constitute to be real or public space but we must fully attempt to understand them as one.

Methodology

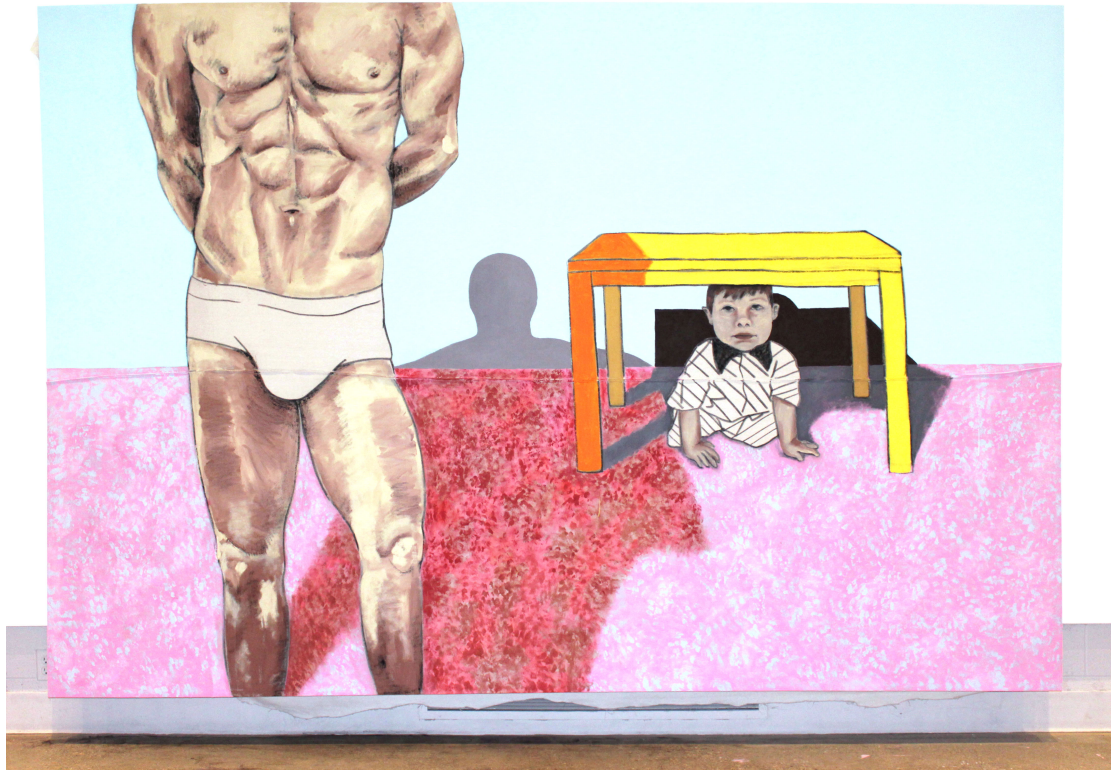
My work finds footing in three different mediums for this show. They are large-scale paintings, a performance rooted in a chapbook of poems I have created, and a film. One way that I begin to move forward with ideas of masculinity is how the work is actually created. I believe it is no longer valuable for a work of art to trick us, to stand before us as a masterpiece. In our contemporary culture defined by

the likes of bad men who trick and lie to us it is necessary that art works do not. I begin to take this on by making work quickly, which both responds to the false sacredness in an object or image but also to how we digest information. I think there's two ways to understand how we have viewed the making of art objects, one being that that is created very slow, the masterpieces of the renaissance, which are meant to sit before as higher powers, the pinnacle of the hyper masculine. Now the relationship between slow and fast in these works looks like this to me; The work is created slow, but then becomes sacred very fast. When I think about making images I work for the opposite. I make work quickly, the ideas are not sacred, the object is not something to glorify a false deity over, but the process after the work is made is slow, it is meant to be contemplated in a larger framework but not from the perspective that it is a masterpiece, but that it is a member of a democratic society with a voice.

I'm naturally drawn to certain images, but I'm not interested in asking why at first. This is another moment that work moves fast. Once the work is made the process of understanding how these images live in a new context is slow and needs to be in order to understand how it can exist or communicate to other objects or people.

My process while making films is very similar. Once I have an image or idea in my head it has to come out quickly. The way these images are documented is by a process that I believe to be really quick and tactile. Although vhs technology is old I think it's one of the last ways other than film, to make video that also exists in the physical world. It's important for a video to be physical, it's the part that is slow, is honest, and separates itself from magic. I'm not interested in magic. As stated we have enough in the world we don't know, enough ego.

Work





Conclusion

My research continues to flourish in the world of Art and its practices and is a space that I believe can harbor positive outcomes. Performance has become a necessary mode for serious communication as it permeates each individual whether a practitioner of art or not. We are all confronted by the human condition and to push those boundaries is to grow as a community. These communities will have the utmost power in defining the ideals for future generations, young boys who begin to age in our world, one that is lead by the ideals of toxic masculinity, and it is up to the members of this community to offer different ideals, ideals rooted in empathy and compassion, not anger and fear. Art works that offer insight into the human condition, not tricking you into believing it has all the power.

Can gender exist without the dichotomy of the phallic and the uterine?

In order for that to be a yes the construction of identities that follow the dichotomy must be destroyed.

How do we do that?

Scream was a film made in 1996. A year after I was born. In the film the killer dresses in a costume

And kills people.

This costume became a popular costume for Halloween.

Children would dance around their neighborhood wearing the costume

And asking people for candy,

But weren't the candy givers afraid they might die?

We'll no,

Because that kid would go home and take off their mask.

Like the costume our identity is constructed as a mask.

Do people go home and take off their masks?

Why would anyone want to wear the mask of a bad man?

And if they're bad can't we find a way to take off their mask?

Is it possible to take off your mask forever?

Be a selfless self?

Citations

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