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Whose House

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Whose House

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2011

Dedication

For my mother Leigh Eastwood and my sister Elizabeth Eastwood.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Whose House

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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This report outlines the overriding themes, concepts, processes, and influences in my work over the last three years. Although my work has progressed much during that time, I still have a fundamental interest in using a reactive and intuitive process to elicit ideas. This process undermines legibility through layering and then imposes a frame to contain each piece to let specific images emerge. Much of my work relates to the human form either formally or through its uncanny relation to the viewers own body.

Through these methods I make images and objects that project my personal psychological cycle of fascination, repression, terror and humor.

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Patterns of thinking are becoming less rational. With the collapse of many of the modern era's hierarchical belief systems, and their replacement by multifaceted alternatives, people are moving away from hierarchically structured rational thinking to a more perceptual, less structured outlook and a more irrational mode of thought. An irrational outlook in fact might be a more appropriate approach to a world that seems to have outgrown its modern utopian faith in rational solutions.

--Jeffrey Deitch POST HUMAN EXHIBIT CATALOG ESSAY 1992-93

My work is linked to an interest in movements stemming from Dada to the Pattern and Decoration Movement to recent art scenes like Fort Thunder in Providence Rhode Island. The art made in these movements is exciting to me because of its hybridization of many types of art practice. Working within a context of hybridization is where I feel most comfortable. I explore my own experiences, inventions, terrors and humor through my work and I use various materials to illustrate the human form in different ways.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Thematically, my work employs different mediums and processes so I can be reactive and surprise myself. Using process to reveal ideas keeps my work fresh and unpredictable, and is a means for creating work that's energetic and active. My work undermines legibility through layering, I then impose a frame to contain each piece and let specific images emerge. I am attracted to caricatured, emblematic, and graphic work because of its humor, readability, and visual reference to pop culture. Pop culture's effect is interesting because it constantly relays a cacophony of information with searing immediacy and leaves indelible

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

images in the collective consciousness. The skateboard and surf graphics of Jim Phillips, the comic and graphic work of artists like Charles Burns, Gary Panter and Mat Brinkman as well as the work of the Hairy Who, specifically Jim Nutt and Karl Wirsum, are all influential because of their awareness and sensitivity to line, composition, and design. Brinkman and Panter have an ability to mix messy and awkward line work with refined and sensitive compositions.
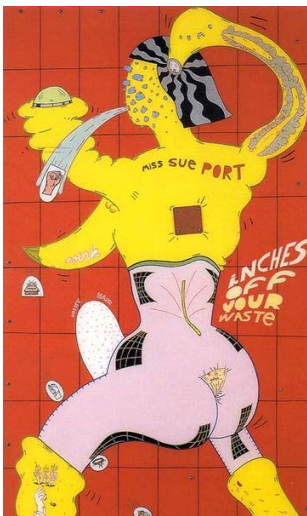
Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

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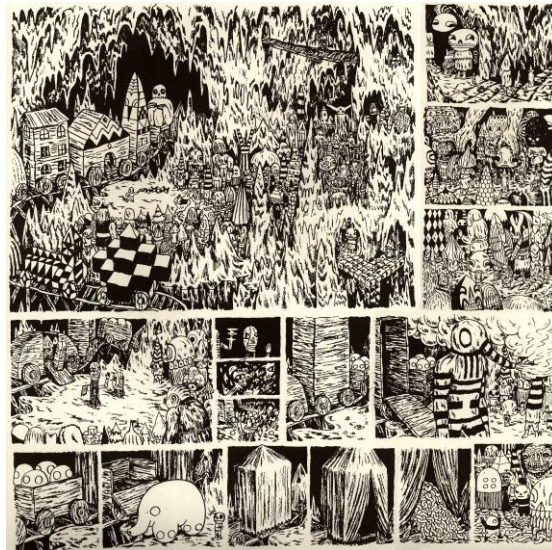
I combine clean materials with broken, raw, and dirty components to leave interpretations open-ended. Juxtaposing hard/soft and clean/dirty binary traits with the friction of kitsch's humor and absurdity creates another means for the viewer and myself to access the work. I have a genuine fondness and appreciation for kitsch and the stereotypically soft traits of fabric patterns, sewing, rounded forms, and garish color lend a decorative aesthetic that comes from my interests in hand-crafts in general and the Pattern and Decoration (P and D) movement, particularly the early work of Kim MacConnel. MacConnel's work is particularly interesting because he creates humorous juxtapositions with patterning while also creating more raw and even violently constructed tapestries of found patterns.
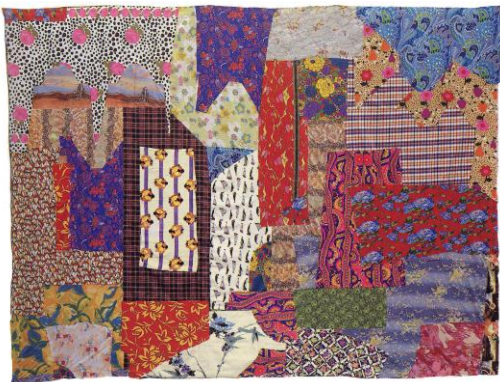
Figure 12

Figure 13

The Pattern and Decoration movement in America became an object of disdain and dismissal after interest in the movement peaked in 1975. In 2008, art critic Holland Cotter said P and D was, "the first and only art movement of the postmodern era and may well prove to be the last art movement ever." It was a movement made up of artists that felt a profound alienation from Minimalism,

which they believed to be cold and impersonal. P and D also found Minimalism hypocritical because the physical artwork of Minimalism, while supposedly more important conceptually, was a very expensive commodity on the art market. P and D pointed out that the negative view of decoration was one not shared by non-Western cultures. Instead the intricate, well-thought-out patterning found in Islamic, Byzantine and Celtic art was conceptual in its own right.

My specific interest in the Pattern and Decoration movement stems from its heightening of what was "low" cultural art. P and D's defense was that that the roots of abstraction derived from both pattern and decoration and that the rhythm of pattern could be seen as a precursor to the grid structure found in much of modern art. In high art, patterning was seen as peasant art from the non-West that was done mostly by women for decorative purposes. For my practice, P and D's repositioning of pattern for the avant-garde created a precedent for making the domestic "other" a part of the art conversation.

The opposing side of my soft and decorative concerns is shown through the use of jagged spiked forms, dripped latex, and a messy application of materials. These traits all speak of frustration, hardness, gore, and camp that illustrate the trope of "maleness" and my interest in the baroque, garish and ridiculous qualities of violent, horror and "b" films.

Figure 14

Figure 15

The horror genre's focus on the actual blood and guts of life and death were impossible for me to detach from reality as a child. As an adult, the genre is unthreatening yet exciting precisely because of its rote manipulation of blood and guts. Its presupposition of lurking danger and death around any and every corner is a part of my actual anxieties as an adult. Latex, which is used in the make-up effects industry, is a stand-in for flesh that is gruesome and comical at the same time.

In the catalogue essay "Playing with Dead Things" for his 1993 curatorial show **The Uncanny**, Mike Kelley begins with a quote from Sigmund Freud; "It may be true that the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it." Kelley goes on to describe his own curatorial relationship to the idea of the uncanny through its physical characteristics. Kelley's defining points for the uncanny's psychological effect on the viewer and its representation of the inanimate human figure stem from the work's one-to-one scale in relation to the viewer, flesh color rather than the

monochromatic Classical Greek model, and fragmentation as a microcosm for the whole.

My own psychological cycle of fascination, fear, repression, and fragmentation has led to my interest in Kelley's "uncanny." However, I tend to use a cartoonish version of the human figure. I am interested in implementing Kelley's idea of the one-to-one scale relationship to the viewer as well as fragmentation's ability to evoke uncanny qualities. Making Halloween masks is one method I utilize to create a one-to-one scale with the viewer while using the mask a "canvas" for painting. The masks also invoke decapitated heads.

Figure 16

The process of installation is another means of creating a one-to-one relationship with the viewer. Installation makes the viewer aware of their own body and thus they become psychologically absorbed in the space they occupy. My recent installation projects have relied much more on fragmentation as a way of showing how we tend to reconstruct memories of specific places and spaces.

Where Kelley's uncanny relates to flesh color rather than the monochromatic, I use latex as well as my own clothing as a means of personally contextualizing this quality. A pair of my own pants that I used in the work ***Pants***

with Legs as well as in a separate installation have been cut in half along the legs and sewn together along the waist so that they form an "**X**". This creates a double of a truncated body that formally summons the image of the scarecrows (an object that requires the evocation of an uncanny quality to function properly) seen in the 1968 film ***Planet of the Apes*** starring Charlton Heston.

Latex's skin-like quality directly connects it to a flesh-like and thus uncanny quality. The color, appearance and tactility of latex can be used as paint

Figure 17

Figure 18

but it maintains its own unique physical structure. Latex ties into my previously mentioned adolescent interests in horror and sci-fi effects make-up, a source I constantly mine. I am attracted to the mindset that absorbs everything from art in comic books, record albums, fine art, MTV, and cartoons. All are interchangeably used for inspiration.

Cultural images of adolescent rebellion relate to my interests in the connotations of sub-cultures. Many sub-cultures are born from the adolescent stage of human development due to youth's frustration and even disdain for the mainstream and a desire to be part of an "other". Specifically sub-cultures of music, despite their obvious aesthetic differences, all share the same dissatisfaction with a prevailing mainstream. From the 1950/60's folk revival scene to punk and p-funk scenes, each refused to recognize the hierarchy of pop music. I am interested in how these groups follow a cycle that begins with opposition, then assimilation and ultimately reinvention as a new scene with updated interests but with a similar oppositional attitude.

The revival of Folk music in the fifties and sixties was concerned with reconnecting to a rural populist music and rejecting the electrified harshness and brashness of rock and roll. Folk music of the time, which carried the stigma as being left-wing during the 1950s Red Scare, was driven underground and practiced by a handful of artists. Barred from mainstream outlets, artists were restricted to performing in schools, homes, and camps. Because of this underground performance, the folk-music scene became a phenomenon associated with bohemia and the Greenwich Village scene. By the early 60's the pop mainstream had absorbed folk and tailored acts like Peter Paul and Mary.

Punk music was concerned with recapturing rock and roll's wild and rebellious roots from the tame and well-tailored mainstream rock aesthetic of the mid 70's. Punk's D.I.Y. approach emphasized volume and attitude over

musicianship, rebelling against the cultural status quo of white suburban family values. The punks saw this nuclear family model as corrupt and a failed social construct. At Punk's inception in the late 70's, there was an openness of expression of both dress and musical form. Like the folk scene before it, Punk became codified and restricted because of the mainstream success of the bands like the Clash and the Sex Pistols. After this success, Punk too took on a look, sound, and attitude that was easily packaged, digested and disseminated.

Parliament and *Funkadelic* were formed and fronted by George Clinton in 1968 from his Soul/Doo Wop group *The Parliaments*. P-Funk or pure funk, the sub-genre created by *Parliament* and *Funkadelic*, was an ornately costumed psychedelic mix of rock and roll, raw funk, science fiction, black empowerment, drugs, and fun mixed with the musical tightness learned from James Brown, who a handful of P-funk members, including Bootsy Collins, had played with. Unlike James Brown, who kept tight compositional reigns on how and what his band members played, George Clinton took a jazz approach. He chose musicians whose playing he liked and then gave them the freedom to "do their thing" when making records and performing live. P-funk was a breakthrough that turned the R&B community upside down and yet remained completely inaccessible to white mainstream audiences. After about a decade the bands split due internal conflicts over money, music-writing credits, and label disputes.

Pedro Bell, the artist who created *Funkadelic*'s album covers beginning on their fifth album *Cosmic Slop,* created swarming, garish, and absurd

depictions of black street culture, sex, and science fiction that perfectly matched the music on each record. For my own art practice, Bell's visionary album artwork and P-funk's style are key examples of exciting and enticing art forms because of their natural exposition of the taboo, nasty, and absurd.
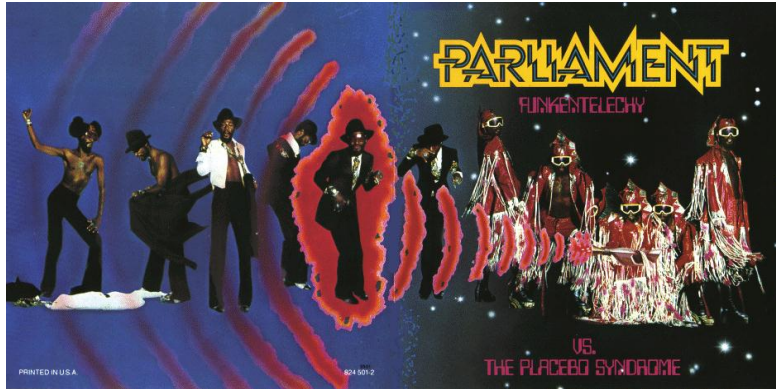
Figure 19

Figure 20

A piece that exemplifies a repackaging of my thoughts about rebellious youth culture is a piece I made in 2010 for a show at Okay MTN. Gallery in Austin, TX. The dichromatic, *The Man Reappropriation Project,* was inspired by Monument Avenue, a street in Richmond, Virginia, which is lined with statues of Confederate Heroes. I choose to make my own statue that illustrated an imagined post-upheaval future. The pedestal and smashed statue were flipped on their side and the pedestal hollowed out to create an intimately sized discotheque complete with disco ball and dance music. The name of the represented hero was replaced with the generic title "The Man." I felt the piece was an obvious satire of the aggrandizing and offensive statues that lined Monument Ave. Since "The Man" was made of cardboard and had a plaque with an anti-authoritarian slang term, "The Man," the piece had a humorous and obviously rebellious quality that I liked. It became its own satire of undirected impotent angst.

Figure 21

Figure 22

Figure 23

"The Man" delineated a shape like a product package of cigarettes. This "packaging" was a way of containing the viewer in the cave-like interior where club music played. Since the cramped space made it ineffectual as a discotheque, the space commented on its own dysfunction, basically becoming a joke within its invented post-upheaval narrative. The question could be asked, "If the purpose of overthrowing 'the man' was to create this ineffective communal space for entertainment and enjoyment, then what was the point of the initial upheaval." I sold pieces of "The Man" in a bag with a screen printed label that read, "Now you can have a piece of the man, for a lil' cash in hand." I was thinking of the mementos of the Berlin Wall that seemed to be everywhere after East and West Germany reunited in 1989. I wanted to sell a novelty item that expressed the ridiculousness behind the idea that owning a piece of "the man"

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could be an empowering gesture.

In the piece entitled **Bullshit Thoughts Rot Your Meat**, the lyric "Bullshit Thoughts Rot Your Meat" from the **Funkadelic** song **Good Thoughts, Bad Thoughts**, is a declaration that lyrically examines how mental suffering is the result of unchecked negative thinking. The text is made from cut paper screen-printed on a child's G.I. Joe bed sheet. The text simultaneously resembles intestines and brains so it references "shit" and "thoughts," respectively. The simple and decidedly funky pronouncement resonates with my own art practice. Like the slogan rails against, the anguish of self-doubt and failure are constant motivating problems within my studio practice.

Figure 24

My recent installation project **Basement House** enables me to bridge conceptual gaps that have prevailed in my work recently. As an installation it contains separate pieces while containing separate ideas, creating a multilayer singular structure. The inception of the piece came from the desire to create a staircase with the sole purpose of making the viewer ascend only to immediately

Figure 25

require them to descend into a created space. The simple and immediate spatial reaction of a climb and descent creates a strange yet familiar vantage into, around, and out of a space that is crucial to the aesthetic experience of entering a basement as well as a home itself. The effect of the staircase is also a trick. Because the gallery space is limited it is impossible to dig an actual hole in order

to create a subterranean space. So both the "house" and "basement" exist on the same floor.

Creating a fictional basement is about claiming a space inside of a structure that is otherwise neutral. The basement contains the functional as well as dysfunctional detritus of the progenitor who owns the space above the basement. But the basement is also a place of creation, fantasy, freedom, and even fear of the progeny who is relegated to a space that is essentially cut away from the rest of the home.

Figure 26

Basement House, while commingling both the progenitor's functional/dysfunctional detritus and progeny's creations, has five installation videos of different bands that contextualize the "underground" in a different psychological context. Parliament, The Incredible String Band, Bad Brains, The

Minutemen, and Arthur Russell were all musical acts that created their own world of aesthetics within their respective musical genres. Just as the basement is a world beneath a house, so is each band a separate world within the genres they are associated with. The world of Parliament and P-funk has already been explored in terms of its context to an underground.

With the Incredible String Band (the ISB) (formed in Scotland in 1966), I wanted to represent what I thought was a more exciting, refreshing, and accurate aspect of the utopian hippie counter-culture and underground before it became completely burned out by the disco-era seventies. In 1968, their most fervent and prolific year, the ISB released their two most celebrated albums *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* and *Wee Tam and The Big Huge* (issued as two separate albums in the US). These albums mark the ISB's most conceptually avant-garde engagement and deal with themes of religion, mythology, and identity. The ISB's performances were more theatrical than most of their contemporaries. In addition to the spectacle of band members switching between a stage full of instruments during songs, their concerts featured poems, an array of costume changes, surreal sketches and additional dancers, all in vaudevillian and homegrown style. Although the ISB enjoyed major UK success, interest in the band stared waning in 1970 and by 1974 the group fell apart because of internal artistic conflicts. Over the succeeding decades the band vanished into obscurity.

With the videos of Bad Brains and the Minutemen, I wanted to feature representations of the early 80's hardcore punk underground that formed after

major labels co-opted punk rock of the late 70's. The African-American lineup of Bad Brains (from Washington D.C.) was a completely foreign entity in the mostly white community of hardcore punk. Far from a novelty, the Bad Brains' raw explosive energy as a punk band and their ability to effortlessly shift to downbeat dub and reggae proved that they were true musicians as well.

The Minutemen were another band that did not fit within the conventional hardcore punk model. An eclectic mixture of funk, rock, punk, and rhythm and blues, The Minutemen's jangly guitar and driving percussive bass-lined songs were lyrically political but were also more light-hearted and whimsical than their hardcore contemporaries. The band split up after their guitarist D. Boon died in a van accident in 1985.

Arthur Russell, the musician that most defies categorization, was a cellist, composer, and singer whose work spanned the genres of disco, classical, new wave and experimental. He was fervently involved in making music for what was the nascent underground disco-scene of the mid 70's. He constantly attempted to blend avant-garde noise experimentation and cello-based classical with pop music. Russell was prolific but was notorious for leaving songs unfinished and continually revising them. When he died in 1992 he left behind more than 1000 tapes, 40 of which were different mixes of the same song.

I have only experienced the bands I discussed through some kind of media rather than live performance. What I know of each act comes from a mediated memory that romanticizes and ultimately creates a sense of nostalgia

for a place, time, and community that is based solely on its mediated image. This kind of reconstructed mediated memory mirrors the psychology that is proliferated by the building of, and engagement with, **Basement House.** **Basement House** is a space built from memory and invention, both known to be fallible, partial and selective. Collectively, the artworks, images, videos and constructions within **Basement House** elicit their own sense of the uncanny.

The rotating sculpture that houses a projector, video camera, speaker, and slinky deals with the same idea of mediated memory. The projection is a surveillant reflection of the basement space via the video camera, which creates another way of viewing the space. The projection removes the viewer as the sole mediator and adds a layer that is ephemeral yet photographically real which creates confusion about what the viewer is actually seeing. The sensation the projection produces is much like memory, which creates an out-of-body feeling. This feeling is much like the experience of trying to recall distant or shadowy recollections. The dragged and amplified slinky is affiliated with the other childish objects housed in **Basement House**. It's re-appropriation as an instrument that creates ceaseless ambient noise produces something more haunting than its origin as a child's toy.

Figure 27

My recent series of drawings have been another way of focusing on containment within a specified frame. I wanted to transform the limitless compositional choices within the interior of **Basement House** into colorless, frozen, individual drawings. Each drawing is composed so that the image contained looks excruciatingly pressed to multiple sides of the physical page. I use fragments and mutations of the body as well as solid black lines, cracks, and depictions of other organic material for formal geometric structure. I then cut puns into the surface of each drawing as a reductionist method of creating a new

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layer of information. The puns relate to the drawing itself and create another structure for articulating the image space. These drawings are another way to express my interests in conveying a psychological cycle of terror, humor fascination, repression, and fragmentation.

Collaboration is a significant part of my work. **Boozefox** (an inversion of the **Fusebox** performance festival in Austin, TX) is a four-member group dedicated to making impermanent monumental multi-media sculptures out of simple and discarded materials. The members of **Boozefox** have different skills but share an interest in creating interactive monuments that interchangeably use the dynamics of humor, funk, science fiction, fantasy and social critique. **Boozefox** allows each member to use their strengths to make much larger and more complicated work than they could ever achieve individually. By maintaining a dialogue and constantly asserting concerns about the potential possibilities and pitfalls of each piece, the group maintains a creative equilibrium. Collaborative interaction excites me because it helps me realize of one of my utopian ideals of working in a truly cooperative fashion.

Figure 28

21

Figure 29

Figure 30

My collaborative efforts come from my interest in other groups like Forcefield, Paperrad, and Dearraindrop. Forcefield, now defunct, was a collective that belonged to the larger warehouse art and music scene of Fort Thunder in Providence R.I. Paperrad and Dearraindrop were tangentially involved in the world of Providence and Fort Thunder. All three were interested in doing many things at once so that noise music, prints, drawings, paintings, and videos were interchangeable and multipurpose depending on each project. Although each group made art that shared themes, each collective maintained its own vision. These collectives' D.I.Y. work ethic and swarm of psychedelia, punk, craft, pattern, pop, gore, aggression and humor continue to inspire my collaborative practice.

Figure 31

Figure 32

Figure 33

Another of my collaborative efforts is a music, noise, and video project called **Air Jordan**. Undertaken with one of the members of **Boozefox**, **Air Jordan** is an outlet for being in a "band". Although **Air Jordan** usually performs in music venues it is a different than a traditional band. I control the music and noise and my collaborator controls the video manipulations live via computer, midi control, and multiple video mixers. The video creates a loose narrative arc that conveys the feeling of a turbulent journey by dousing the viewer with repetitive bits of childhood pop ephemera, movie clips, computer generated 3-D models and video feedback. This repetitive, epic and irritating imagery echoes

audibly and physically, due to high volume, with the music and noise I make. This obviously aggressive project is also ambient at moments if only to create a plateau for the next sonic assault. **Air Jordan** is an effort to keep rock music relevant and exciting in 2011 and beyond.

Figure 34

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