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It is the aim of my recent work to explore the nuances between the representation and the reality of that which I depict. To realize this notion, I only work with materials that have associations to the subject matter depicted. This associative manner of approaching art ensures a bond between the artist, the work of art and its subject matter.

THE QUERY OF DEPICTION

by

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THE QUERY OF DEPICTION

I find there to be a disconnect between most representational art and what the artist is attempting to depict. The nature of this problem is rooted in the artist's consideration of materials. An oil painting of a man has a greater relationship to linseed oil and pigment than it does to the sitter. It is the aim of my recent work to explore the nuances between the representation and the reality of that which I depict.

The constraints that I apply to my work are essential to its integrity. My pieces must be composed of elements derived from, or relative to, the thing depicted. This is my resolution for closing the gap between materials and depiction. If my materials are disconnected from my subject matter, then I consider the integrity of the piece to be compromised. In *Beef Steak & Parsley on Cutting Board*, 2007, the form of the cow is created with actual flank steak and the cutting board and parsley are materials that I relate to my own experience of consuming cow meat. If I created the image of the cow out of goat meat, or if the ground were a shoebox instead of a cutting board, then my relationship to the materials is put into question, and the piece loses its value to me.

Language can be a springboard that I use to make associative correlations in my work. In *Pigskin*, 2007, the title is derived from a popular nickname for a football. Footballs are not made from the skin of a pig, nor have they ever been reported to be. Regulation footballs are composed of cow leather that is stretched over a rubber bladder. The reason for the ball's colloquial nickname is likely due to the fact that before the

patenting of vulcanized rubber in 1844, the bladder inside of the ball was often an actual bladder of a pig. I took interest in this curious vernacular, and set about creating a piece that dealt with artificiality, as it relates to the identity of a football as pigskin. To create this piece, I covered the leather of a regulation size, collegiate football with crushed pork rinds. The surface of this fried pork skin resembles the pebble-grain texture that footballs are normally stamped with. I then adorned the lace and the white stripes of the ball with straw-colored hog bristle. Both of these pig-derived materials were affixed to the ball with a gelatin-based glue, which is commonly used for leather bookbinding. Gelatin is a material that is derived from ground bones of livestock, and these bones include those of pigs. The pork rinds, hog bristle, and gelatin, therefore, function together to create a literal skin of pig. The artificiality of this skin is echoed by the yard of artificial turf, upon which the ball is presented. This turf is an inorganic substance, plastic, that is meant to emulate living grass.

This associative manner of approaching art ensures a bond between the artist, the work of art and its subject matter. These bonds render the materials that I use essential; they are intrinsically linked to the reading of the work.

The subject matter of my work can be read as the anecdotal relationships within the work. These anecdotal relationships include the materials that I use, as well as the formal content of that which I am depicting. In other words, the subject matter is both the images that I create and the materials that I arrange to create these images. The subject of my work is the reconciliation between the materials and the image. For

example, the subject matter of *Eggshell, Fried Egg White & Fried Yolk on Teflon Pan and Porcelain Plate*, 2007, is the fried eggs, as well as the forms of the hen and the chicks that the eggs create. The subject of the piece is the relationship that the eggs have to the forms of the chickens.

One contemporary artist that I am looking to for inspiration is Marc Quinn. I have been captivated by Quinn's sculptural work ever since I first saw *Self*, 1991. This self-portrait bust is cast from 4.5 liters of the artist's own blood. In another piece, *Lucas*, 2001, Quinn casts a likeness of his three-day-old son, using his son's liquidized placenta. I began looking at Quinn's work at a point in time when I was questioning the depths of my relationship to the materials that I was using. I found it frustratingly difficult to establish an intimate bond between my materials, my subject matter, and myself. Marc Quinn's work opened up the possibility for me that materials can be more than just a tool to create the image. My first piece in this body of work, *Sucrose*, 2007, demonstrates this bond. In this wall installation, I mapped out a diagram of a sucrose molecule using different, highly processed snack cakes to represent the carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen atoms that compose the molecule. The bonds are created with toothpicks, a material not composed of sucrose, but associated with the consumption of some confections.

Both of Marc Quinn's aforementioned pieces require refrigeration to exist. In relation to my own work, I found this extreme temporality to be problematic. When the cooling unit malfunctions, which happened to the original version of *Self*, the piece can no longer exist. My solution for this dilemma was to allow my pieces of greater

transience to exist solely in documentation. This granted me the freedom to create pieces like *Fried Egg White & Fried Yolk on Baking Sheet, 2007*. If the actual object were on display in a gallery, the egg would dry and crack within a matter of hours. Although this impermanence has potentially interesting connotations, I am more interested in the idea of creating work that I have a greater control over the consistent appearance of.

In these photographic works, the image cannot be a surrogate for the actual object, but it can still relay the content of the object. The image of the egg yolk cannot convey the tactility and aroma of experiencing the object in person. These pieces serve more as windows into worlds that the viewers can relate to their own experiences. A way that I establish this type of familiarity is by reproducing the image at a believable scale to the object that is depicted. This constraint of proportions allows the viewer to make a more personal correlation to the pans, plates, and eggs that they likely use in their own kitchens.

Processed materials play an important role in the creation of my work. The materials that I use are often already a step removed from their initial forms. For instance, pork rinds have been so altered by frying, and by the addition of artificial colors and preservatives, that they are hardly recognizable as the skin of a pig. Once removed from their initial states, organic materials take on entirely different functions. They are transformed from living organisms to consumable products. By visually alluding to the original states of these materials, I am attempting a reconciliation between the material and its inherent being. Although the form of the cow does not transform the meat into a

completed animal, it establishes a relationship that is not present in the nondescript lump of flesh that is available at the market.

Much of my creative force is channeled through my sense of humor, and use of word play. Humor is a filter through which I cope with the apathetic aspects of my reality. Like the majority of our culture, I am both a lover and a consumer of animals. I can just as easily feel fondness for a living cow as I can feel a ravenous hunger for its tender brisket. *Pickle Loaf, Smoked Ham, Salami, & Pork Rinds on Butcher Paper*, 2007, directly addresses this dual relationship that I possess with certain animals. As its title suggests, the pigs depicted in this image are represented by a sampling of pork-based lunch meats. The forms of the pigs are tensed, as they fight each other for their feed. Their meal is represented by a perspectival carpeting of crushed pork rinds. The image is grounded upon a small piece of shimmering butcher paper. This piece is whimsical on one level, as it references the childish pastime of playing with food. This initial reading lends to an image of the artist taking great care and love to cut these forms out of such everyday, household materials. A darker reading, however, is made available where the forms of the pigs clarify the cruel reality of the source of that food. The cannibalistic nature of their action references a certain reality of the livestock industry. Raisers of livestock have been known to feed their animals byproducts of their processed livestock. In the case of herbivorous animals like cattle, this can even result in contraction of mad cow disease.

I do not intend to make fun of my subject matter, nor do I attempt to evoke sympathy for it. This ambiguity of intent is reflective of my ambivalent feelings toward the sources of my materials. I do not attempt to establish complete control over how each viewer reads my pieces. I expect my viewers to bring their own agendas and biases when they look at my work. It does not matter to me whether the viewers choose to interpret the work in relation to their own politics, or if they decide to read the work in strictly formal terms. By presenting familiar materials in the context of their sources, I intend my work to serve as Rorschach Tests for the viewers' individual conditions.

CATALOGUE

Richter, Ari. *Beef Steak & Parsley on Cutting Board*. Digital print. 2007.

Richter, Ari. *Pigskin*. Ground pork rinds, hog bristle and gelatin glue on leather football, with rubber kicking tee and artificial turf. 2007.

Richter, Ari. *Eggshell, Fried Egg White & Fried Yolk on Teflon Pan and Porcelain Plate*. Digital Print. 2007.

Richter, Ari. *Fried Egg White & Fried Yolk on Baking Sheet*. Digital Print. 2007.

Richter, Ari. *Pickle Loaf, Smoked Ham, Salami, & Pork Rinds on Butcher Paper*. Digital Print. 2007.