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For my Mother, my Father and my Lauren

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ABSTRACT

UNTITLED

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This thesis defense and accompanying thesis exhibition is an investigation of cultural myths about race, gender and sexuality. The body is used as a familiar form to which metaphorical elements are added. These elements are combined in a way that creates the kind of cognitive dissonance that cultural myths are meant to reconcile, which, in turn exposes those myths and biases.

The exhibition includes five life-size charcoal figure drawings. The drawings are rendered in a style that is influenced by classical techniques. The artists such as Rembrandt van Rijn and Michelangelo Merisi de Caravaggio influence the way I model the form. Other, more contemporary, influential artists include Egon Schiele, Odd Nerdrum and Luis Caballero whose work informed these figures both technically and conceptually. It is all these artists which are my foundation of the use of the body as a tool for conversations of the human condition. The theoretical scaffolding that this exhibit is based on includes the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

INTRODUCTION

All of the works are composed of life-sized, isolated, and stripped down figures. The figures are removed from any type of environment then specific elements are added to a narrow range of the body, often mimicking what they are masking. The idea that the figure must be represented as separate from all other aspects of society is essentially one of existentialism, the concerns of the condition of the individual in a modern setting. The works of Jean Paul Sartre have had a particular influence in this area, specifically *the Age of Reason*, in which he states, "Man is alone in the universe with no goals besides that which he sets himself" (Sartre 4). This is the significant gesture which formulated the solitary compositions, and is used as the driving force to create the set system that all the works are based on.

Cognitive dissonance is another main tool used in the creation of these works to challenge biased belief systems. This tool is used in multiple aspects of the work. First, These biased beliefs are met with the strict system that I have created in order to form an opposition. This system was developed in its relationship to the history of drawing and painting and how cognitive dissonance can be applied to it. Here, the figure is fully realized in the rendering of mass and light, but with a medium that is used as a preliminary step in its relation to painting. Secondly, I am presenting finished works in the manner of a classical mode, but denying a traditional resolution by holding them in the area of drawing. It is this application of a colorless medium to a method which is historically used as a study that sets up a dissonant conversation to classical representations of the body. To this strictly rendered form cultural objects are then added

furthering the sense of dissonance.

CULTURE VERSUS NATURE

If we define nature as everything which is not cultural, then the naked body is a representation of nature. Culture and nature have always been situated on opposite poles, but are continually linked upon the trajectory of a humanistic viewpoint, as only humans may stand within both territories. The brain and genitals are separated at one, yet still connected through the curve of the spine. It has always been the areas where culture and nature overlap that have interested me, and how to manipulate these connections. Through the process of this investigation the idea that the rendered body could never truly escape its cultural connection became evident. Only in art can the attempt to remove the body from conditions of culture exist, but even this attempt must be recognized as a project in creating a new culture, firmly entrenched in the present.

Specific elements are then added to create a new cultural context. By setting the figure outside of culture than the body will become de-socialized, letting the subject and object occupy the same territory. This leads to a metaphorical representation of the body. By setting these figures as solitary objects removed from an environment they appear to be continually in the present, and therefore without a history. They contain no internal devices, and will function as objects that can only exist in their relationship to the viewer. These forms are displayed in a perpetual form of the gesture, the method of their positioning, as if displayed on a stage. This aspect of the work directly correlates to the ideas of Antonin Artaud and his Theater of Cruelty, and by its extenuation the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari from *Anti-Oedipus*, and their notions of the Body without Organs, or BwO. The BwO is a form which is situated within the actual of the

present functions of the body held in reality, but also of its potential. The figures are things which are static in their act, and their potential must be supplied by the viewer.

PROCESS

I should have been a painter. The most effective way to render flesh in art is with oil paint, but my colorblindness has made an accurate depiction of skin impossible, I should have been a painter. My desire of figuration has always held its strongest resonance when standing in front of a Rembrandt or Caravaggio, the glazes of oil built upon each other to capture the qualities of the body and to hold that inner "glow" as only masterful oil can. It has always been the aim when working with the figure to attempt to capture these qualities, and it is to painting that one looks to for guidance of meeting these ends, or it could be said that these drawings are crafted in the manner of a painting. These techniques were developed by first recognizing what it is about the presence of a painting that holds an interest, accurate representation, the abstraction of the stroke to create mass and embodiment, the mirroring of life within the body, and then working backward inside of the limitations. Mimicking the qualities of oil painting, but translated into charcoal, in order to achieve what little could be gained so as to be closer to the old masters. The task of making a work out of a dry, black piece of dust as stand in for the viscosity of colored oil not only informs the work, but also how I perceive one of my pieces, both in the act of creating it, and in viewing a finished piece.

Learning on a purely academic level, how to craft an oil painting was in order to try and find a common ground with drawing, to steal anything that could be useful. Hours spent in front of Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait* of 1660 or *Man in Oriental Costume* ("*The Noble Slav*") from 1632 on trips to New York, standing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, dissecting the layers of glazes, how cross contour stroke builds form,

how light creates space and meaning, and how the artist used his own fingers to apply paint to the canvass, have had a lasting effect on my studio practice. The most important lesson learned from Rembrandt is the idea of the "untrue mark". If you look at a colorless photograph, and accurate depiction of the human form, everything smoothly fits together, shadows move gently across a face and the skin of an elbow is rough and flaked inside of these gradients. This however is not drawing. In order to capture an accurate representation of the body, line and tone must be applied in a way to create an illusion of mass and flesh in marks which are neither contour or cross-contour, the "untrue-mark". The overall effect of these illusionistic representations through the medium will be to pull together when the work is viewed from a distance, but also will carry their own intrigue when viewed up close, retaining qualities of my hand. All representational art created with the hand is abstraction, and the wish is for the work to stand as exactly what they are, drawings, is achieved through the immediacy of the hand.

Drawing has always held a primary means for my artistic production, not only because of my limitations with color, but also for its immediacy, a work has the potential to hold more emotive qualities if the medium may be manipulated directly by the hand. The question becomes how to make a contemporary work that is viable using charcoal as a medium. Already considered a second-class material, a colorless means, and a technique always held as secondary in its relation to painting in the hierarchy of mode. Charcoal is readily seen as a precursory step to the primary structure which comprises painting, pigment is seen as greater than a grey scale and painting is viewed as superior to drawing, so the question remains. In order to be able to place a drawing in the same breath as painting tradition must, at one, be embraced, and yet suppressed. The classical

application of charcoal must be acknowledged lest the work stand as false, however the limitations of the medium must never be allowed to hold the work in a realm which denies its unique properties. The only way forward is to let a drawing be a drawing, to stand for what it is, firm in craft and flexible in concept. In a contemporary setting the hand has been removed in favor of the mechanical, the virtual and the mass-produced, the removal of the artist and the diminishing of the art object. This method of crafting a work in a conceptual manner has served to distance the personality of the artist from the art. Traditionally the hand has served to stand in for the personality of the artist, working as a display of the unique internal process which is manifested, flaws and all, into a physical representation of the work. The hand follows the mind.

The initial work is laid out in terms of planes, shadows, mid tones and highlights, with a sharp charcoal pencil for a consistent and minimal line weight. Anatomy, proportion and perspective are my major concerns at this beginning state. This is a method learned from looking at the paintings of Euan Uglow, whose meticulous attention to measuring borders on the obsessive, physically marking not only his models position on the floors and walls of his studio, but the models themselves in an efforts to achieve an exactitude of the highest scale.

The emulation of flesh with charcoal must be handled in the same manner as oil to achieve the same volume, manner, and breath. A variety of methods are employed taken from figurative painting to reach these ends. First, the darks are designated, pure black areas of core shadow, using a heavy compressed charcoal, putting in solid areas of pure black. Then the form is modeled in order to give the figure a perceived dimension of mass by using fingers to create large areas of grey tone. By discarding the drawing

instrument at this stage, and employing the hand directly onto the paper to better control the medium in a quick manner, and retain certain desirable aspects of the process, not the least being mistakes, finger prints, and misjudgments in tone which open the work up to chance. At this stage the hand is used in a cross-contour, value heavy mode, mimicking the shape of the body as if I am sliding my hand across a figure. Legs are imagined as cylinders, round and full of meat, ribs are bone which rise and poke out from skin, heads weigh heavy on thin necks, and so on. At this point the body will have been given a rough mass comprised of darks, mid-tones, and the untouched sections of the paper which function as highlights, the overall effect is that of an underpainting, where proportion and light sources play the greatest role. At this point in the process the form has begun to take on the shape of the body, head, shoulders knees and toes, knees and toes, but it is still a rough homunculus not capable of breath.

In order to achieve the qualities of "life" that are sought in a drawing many more layers must be removed and applied over and again, a process which can be thought of as charcoal "glazes". A variety of erasers will be pulled through the varying tones of charcoal, creating marks that will not be as evident in the finished piece. The overall effect of this process will be to create a depth in the flesh, attempting to mimic Rembrandt's "untrue glow". These first marks will serve to retain shape, a highlight against the folded shadow of an armpit, and to create imperfections in what will become flesh. The contrast in tones will also begin to lessen in areas where charcoal is more evenly applied in an effort to create form with shadow, and will heighten in areas of the highest contrasts, black against white. None of these qualities will last long.

After a rough reductive method is applied to the whole of the work, the highlights

will be buffed out, a technique directly taken from Rembrandt, and smooth the overall tone of the work, taking down the level of contrast throughout the piece. A cloth is lightly passed over the whole piece in small, circular motions in order to ease the transitions from dark to light, being mindful of my pressure so as not to completely remove the reduction of the previous step. After this is complete, the process of removal is repeated with erasers, and then buffed again. The desired effect of this method is to slowly build up areas of subtle value, to capture the imperfect representation of flesh. Flesh is not one even tone, and it is not perfect, in fact it is these imperfections which may give its representation life. In an effort to draw this lived in flesh, layers of grey must be built upon themselves and then reduced, and built up again, creating "grey noise". Since my initial work with form is hopefully precise, anatomy is not a concern, only with skin, and how light and shadow play upon it.

After several repetitions of removal and scrubbing the mid tones of the piece will begin to take on a shape and quality of soft flesh. All of these aspects reside in the variance of mid-tones, tones that must be subtle and marked, so the drawing at this stage will be very grey throughout, and this "grey noise" will become overwhelming in the work. The areas that most intrigued me are now buffed out, shadows have been pulled too far into mid-tone or completely taken down, and my untouched highlights are far too bright, over flattening the figure. It is at this point where the whole of the process must be trusted. The eraser will be applied in a heavy, downward stroke in a return to the "untrue mark," before working back heavily into the shadows, laying down thick passages of pure black, built up on the paper. Now the cloth is lightly passed through the shadows into the mid-tones, again in a downward stroke to interact with the downward

stroke of the eraser was just applied. All of this will create another level of "grey noise," over the previous layers, but in a vertical articulation, a cross hatching of tone, to add even more depth to the rendered flesh.

Through the close examination of the paintings of Rembrandt the true illusion of representational works was learned. In discovering that in order to create a piece which is both accurate and emotive, marks must be invented, slashes of medium applied in ways that are "untrue" in order to achieve the appearance of reality. This may sound as a readily obvious thing, that to truly make a two-dimensional work full of breath the subject must be abstracted, and the memory of the photograph must be discarded, but for me it was a true turning point. This realization was of such significance for me not only because of the physical act of producing a work of art, but more importantly, the conceptual method in which I learned to produce art. What was learned was that the practice of crafting an illusionistic representation of three-dimensional space on a two dimensional plane was a practice in abstraction. To make a body seem as if it were alive, occupying space in a lived-in form, with charcoal what could be drawn was not exactly what was seen, what need to begin was something that only "appeared" real. This practice of making the "untrue mark" to represent something that was in fact a lie began to influence my thinking on the crafting of a work on a conceptual level. I learned to create a work through manipulation and reduction of medium, and it is this manipulation and reduction that would be employed to all aspects of the work. Manipulation became alteration of the body through damage, and reduction formed my thinking as it related to formal concerns of art, specifically doing away with compositions, and everything which sits outside the body, objects and environment were removed.

ARTISTIC REFERENCES

The artists who have influenced this work are connected through their common use of the body. Rembrandt has already been discussed for his accurate depiction of the form through the "untrue" mark. Similarly Caravaggio is of importance for his use of light on flesh. Where my work steps away from the Old Masters is in my choice of medium. The use of charcoal is meant to bring into question the cultural stability of the figures in my work.

Where the work begins to take a conceptual foothold is in the method of drawing. The questions of the usefulness of the material of charcoal were handled long ago. Because of color, drafting has always held my interest, firstly in the work of Egon Schiele, and his ability to express aspects of the human condition through line. This is where the first realizations of how a figure will function when removed from an environment. When Schiele depicts the natural form against an empty ground then the body will serve only itself and the representations of its condition. These are the works that allowed me to create a process that could be deemed as fine art. In terms of the application of charcoal, Luis Caballero stands in for Schiele in his choice of material, and his contemporary use of charcoal to render the body. The academic style in which Caballero allows for the work to function within its limitations at the same time serves to embrace its strength, a classical mode with a contemporary context. However, it was the work of Odd Nerdrum which stands as the true mark of what is capable with the medium. Known primarily for his baroque-esque paintings in the manner of Rembrandt, it is his charcoal works which are of the greatest influence. Nerdrum will fully realize a drawing

in preparation for a painting, scale, anatomy, and tone are fully fleshed out just as if they were a painting without color. These works are so highly realized that Nerdrum in fact calls them "paintings." It is these works by Nerdrum which align closest to my own work in their desire for a classical representation within the medium, an art object of contemporary beauty. The figure's role in art has always been one of being, especially in a traditional sense, and its relationship to its situation in culture. The commonality of the territory of the body serves to speak of its conditions, as a form comprised of separate states and federations, in an effort to allow the audience to perceive set notions of culture. The figure may speak a universal language through its accurate representation.

Artists who have had an indirect influence on my work that can be traced back to the five works of this exhibit include Mark Rothko, specifically the fourteen large, near black paintings that are housed inside of the Rothko chapel. These works of solid space seem to negate all sound in their use of the void. My basic systems relate to the work of Robert Longo's *Men in the Cities* series, the blank backgrounds and allegorical bodies, but the similarities end here. Longo's use of clothing as a device sets his figures in a specific cultural context, a context I wish to avoid. Longo's figures reside within culture, but are acting against it, while I wish to situate my figures outside of a specific cultural situation.

In this sense the work is directly influenced from the work of Mike Kelly and Paul McCarthy and their appropriation of the purity myth which comprises their film *Heidi*. Their use of the body to incorporate metaphor, and how culture and nature play upon it is a continuing theme in my work.

NOTES ON TERTIARY INFORMATION

While my thoughts on secondary information, all things which are not the body, fluctuate over the course of the work, my thoughts on tertiary information will not. The definition of tertiary information is all things which relate to a work, but sit outside of the work: titles, materials, size, show titles, etc. There is no use for them, they only complicate matters by adding a new layer of information onto the primary information of the pieces themselves, and something else which needs to be de-coded. I wish my work to stand for what it is. How big is it? It is that size which you see in front of you, life size, who cares for a number in feet? What is the title, or what clues can be given a viewer to help them translate the answers given to them? Answers are not the goal, the work must remain open to interpretation, and so any additional information that the viewer must supply back to the work is distracting and short-circuits these aims. Art is the act of communication, in this case visual, and everything attempting to be communicated is presented to the viewer with the work. The wish for the viewer to contemplate only what is in front of them in the sense of the information supplied them, and the absence of tertiary information frees the audience to participate with the work and draw their own conclusions. If I cannot communicate on any satisfactory level to the viewer with the work itself, the thing, then I have failed in my purpose. Yet for the purposes of clarity we shall give the work a nomenclature. The work will be examined chronologically in their conception, and given the appropriate name, Untitled 1, Untitled 2, Untitled 3 and so on.

UNTITLED 1

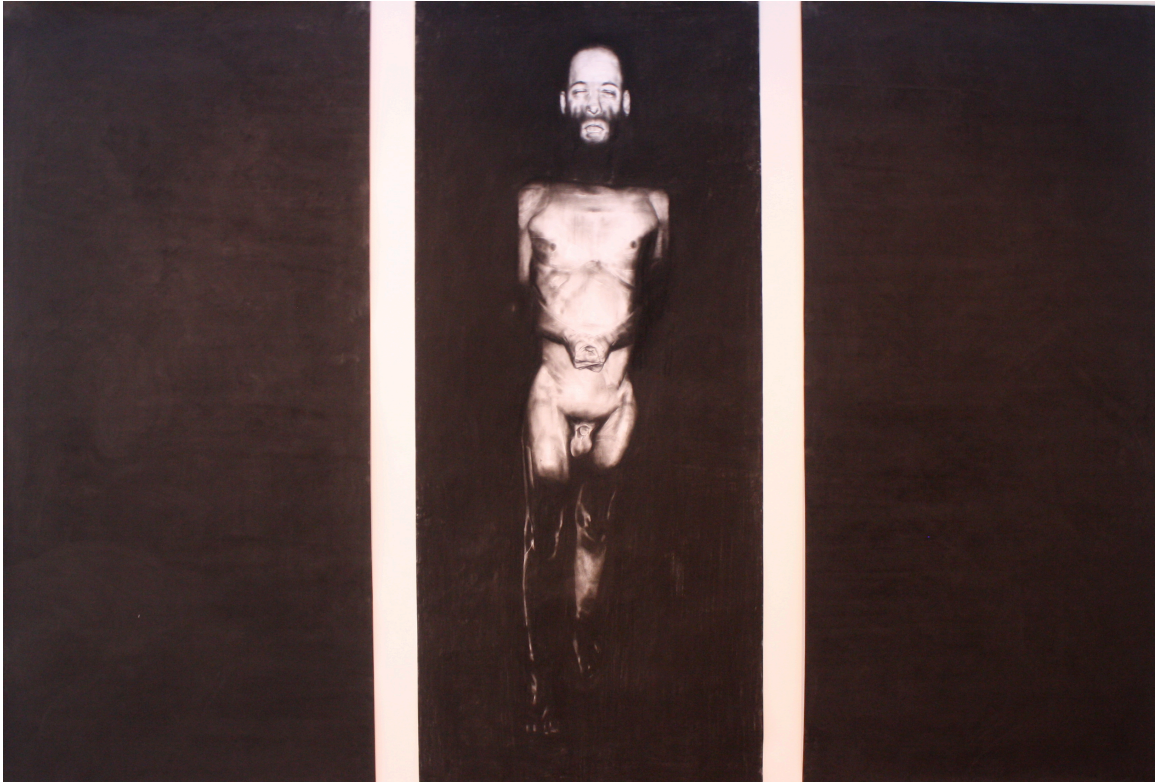


Figure 1, Jonny Cantrell, Untitled, 2010. Charcoal on paper, 121”x91”

Untitled 1 is a drawing consisting of three large panels. The center panel depicts a life-size, castrated, nude male striding out of the darkness with his hands tightly clinched over his navel. His eyes and mouth are half open, situating the manipulated elements of the body in a vertical line, from eyes to phallus. The two solid black panels which flank the body augment the void which surrounds the figure.

Object relation theory established by Melanie Klein examines early childhood

development, particularly the relations to an evolving consciousness with an environment of subjects and objects. The subject's relation to the object can cause a fragmentation of the body, such as a child's relation to the mother's breast which feeds, the "good breast," and the object which denies food, the "bad breast." As a psyche evolves into adulthood these segmentations may carry over to create schisms in a mature life, as when Klein states in her *Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms* from 1946,

I believe that the ego is incapable of splitting the object - internal and external-without a corresponding splitting taking place within the ego. Therefore the phantasies and feelings about the state of the internal object vitally influence the structure of the ego. The more sadism prevails in the process of incorporation of the object, and the more the object is felt to be in pieces, the more the ego is in danger of being split in relation to the internalized object fragment.
(Klein 140)

This whole process will create the notion of the part object, the body made up of separate parts whose functions may only work to network with one another, but never be made whole. The body may be mapped into separate territories, connected in their physical alignment, but forever separate in their emotive aspects of interactions, and what is the modern body if not a segmented reaction to the whole. Teeth must be white but skin cannot, muscles must be developed in their own specific regiment, nails must be of a certain length, the excess cut off and discarded.

Here the part object is set in its relations to other part objects in terms of their

opposition. The figure stands erect, striding out of a blackened void, a void that is at one time a representation of endless depth, yet also flat. Through the use of this void and its application of light and shadow, the head is removed from the rest of the body, serving to detach the personality of the subject from its motor function, recasting the body as injured object by displacing its identity from its sex. Throughout this work the areas of the body which express both the internal and external are displayed in a contradictory fashion, mirroring their own dual function. The eyes and mouth are both half open slits, questioning their role within the body by negating their purpose. The eyes cannot perceive nor be viewed clearly, and the mouth cannot sound nor fully ingest. The hands cannot manipulate the penis which cannot reproduce, the machine of the partial objects of the body cannot engage in their function to the other part objects of the machine of the body. All is damaged in order to call into question its function; all is a separate representation of cognitive dissonance.

The first problem of the part object becomes its usage within a work of art, and how this may be represented. If the body contains all aspects of communication in its representation, then a natural wholeness will present itself, a gestalt. Conditions of stress maybe shown, again looking toward Austrian expressionism, but these may only go so far. When Schiele displays a psychological malady expressed through the tension of the hands contain within the same body and against a blank face, then the internalization of the condition is one that sets the subject outside of society due to illness. However, the illness must not be of a purely schizophrenic nature in its internalization, as with Schiele, but must look outward in its connection with a larger world. Here, again, the writings of Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* are of a fundamental importance. It is really to

these writings that the part object takes its true shape within the work, based upon their notions of the part object. Here the part object is not one of sickness, but of a potential state, and in opposition to Klein,

We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers. We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future date. We no longer believe in age dull grey outlines of a dreary, colorless dialectic of evolution, aimed at forming a harmonious whole out of heterogeneous bits by rounding off their rough edges. We believe only in totalities that are peripheral. And if we discover such totality alongside various separate parts, it is a whole of these particular parts but does not totalize them; it is a unity of all of these particular parts but does not unify them; rather, it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately. (Deleuze and Guattari 42)

All carry lack, and in their lack, violence, sexualized and bracketed. But these objects are not meant to be set whole again, they are meant to circle the other information

within the work, to these other part objects. Clinched hands are held in front of the navel, creating its double, and also servicing as the holes of the body, places where the body opens, where the inside and outside slip. Above the castrated penis sits the symbol of the hole, vaginal or anal, and it is this situation which relates to each of these manufactured organs. The parts are made partial within a situation which is in itself partial based upon the relationships developed by the viewer. It is in the aspect of drawing that these objects are not to be made partial, but created that way. To put it another way, the body is without a culture, and this archetype did not come from a somewhere-sometime, it was birthed into the ways in which it should be.

UNTITLED 2



Figure 2, Jonny Cantrell, Untitled, 2011. Charcoal on paper, 84”x60”

Here, a naked man crouches under the cropped body of a horse, with both of the forms positioned on a blank, white ground. The figures must be removed from all aspects of environment to further the depiction of the de-socialized body. The de-socialized body cannot remain in a state of ambiguous potential if the form is placed in relation to secondary objects not directly connected to the subject. If all that is to be presented is the body, then the narrative will be diminished in an attempt to remake the

viewer as part of that narrative. It is a matter of shifting from identification to identity, using the paper mirror to engage the viewer. This is the system, which I had developed, but aligning one's self too closely to a system can be detrimental. Contradictions and deviations in a body of work can be a helpful means, if only to keep the works from becoming stagnant. I found it helpful to set up such a bracketed system, using it as a guide when it was chosen to leave it. It became as if there was an act against the system, stretching it out to accommodate new ideas, building on the previous framework which had been developed.

In the case of Untitled 2, the work became an abstraction, a condensing, of the previous work. Where Untitled 1 used the part object to demonstrate internal stoppage and divisions in a cultural being, Untitled 2 uses the whole body as part object set in the realm of desire. The lack that is illustrated in the constraints and solitude inside of the de-socialized body becomes a metaphor for the whole existence of the desiring body. Desire will serve to set the entirety of being against the world, as the being itself experiences a connection, which cannot be reciprocated. Here the ideas of *Anti-Oedipus* and the desiring machine come into play. These machines which comprise the separate subjects of the world have a drive to be in concert with other such machines, but desire will cause these connections to be nullified. Desire acts to cause a being to be in itself, remaking the subject as object in its connectivity to the world, for a desire is a state of internalization. Desire is housed within the attempt to rectify an impossible situation, a possession that divides the body into self-related part objects.

In setting the nature of desire into Untitled 2, it was necessary to explore the cultural breaks which serve to separate the whole of the body from the natural. The

condition of desire had to be displayed in a way as to place culture and nature as contradiction in and of themselves. In Untitled 2 the usage of the natural, the horse, are employed in a manner which speaks directly to the figure, also the site of nature. Through the application of the language of the bodies the focal point of the work remains the state of being of the human form. The horse and figure both stand in for an example of nature, yet it is in a connection, which is unnatural. Both of these symbols are used to exemplify the forms as part objects and desiring machines which have no ability to connect physically except in a manner which is violent and sexualized, and against nature. Here the idea that if all elements of culture are removed then the viewer will re-situate these negations inside of the body. What takes its place is that if the elements of nature are set in contradiction to themselves in a way which is taboo, then the whole of the work will take on a cultural element.

Again, the language of the body is important in the understanding of how desire may turn into an element of culture in taboo. When two elements of nature meet in a way that is impossible, then their cultural significance will be taboo, which is the unnatural state of social norms. The human figure is placed in a manner that is vulnerable and submissive, head and legs laid against the removed ground, while the soft tissues of his lower body are raised in reciprocation. He desires to be connected physically to the horse that stands straddling the whole of his curled body, yet the horse has no function with which to exchange these desires. The sexual organs of the horse are left purposefully vague, either as female or as castrated, the whole of its activating body, a phallus.

This work functions as the anti-Caravaggio, and his painting of *The Conversion of Saint Paul* from 1601. In untitled 2 there is no transformation as in Caravaggio, no turn

away from culture to the natural or supernatural. The figure of Untitled 2 has been inverted from the depiction of Saint Paul, and unlike the form painted by the master; the hands are not thrown outward and upward toward heaven, but remain grounded and tense, directly in the sight of the anguished man. The blackened hand serves as a constant reminder to the blackened head that he stands in useless opposition to nature, and that the nature of his desire serves to place him outside of culture as well.

Another division, symbolizing the internal division of the desiring body, is the usage of the paper itself. Here the figures are divided in the joining of the two widths of the sections of paper, yet the transition of the bodies from one piece of paper to another is slightly shifted. The sex and mind have been misaligned in order to demonstrate a disconnect within the nature of the figures. The physical act of splitting the bodies displays a division within the being of the de-socialized figure and realigns the being as something set against itself. This forces the body to act as a thing discontent to its familiar representation, a place where neither nature nor culture may take hold. The sexual divide that occurs when performing an act which sits outside both nature and culture will leave a broken machine. This machine is incapable of unification, and leads the viewer to question which part of the fractured being reside in nature, and which parts of the subject/object reside in culture. The fact that the drawing is in a state that is not as fully finalized as the other works will serve to make the viewer even more uncomfortable. The clear idea that these works have been manipulated by hand, that both of the bodies are in a state of "being touched" highlight their sexual nature.

UNTITLED 3

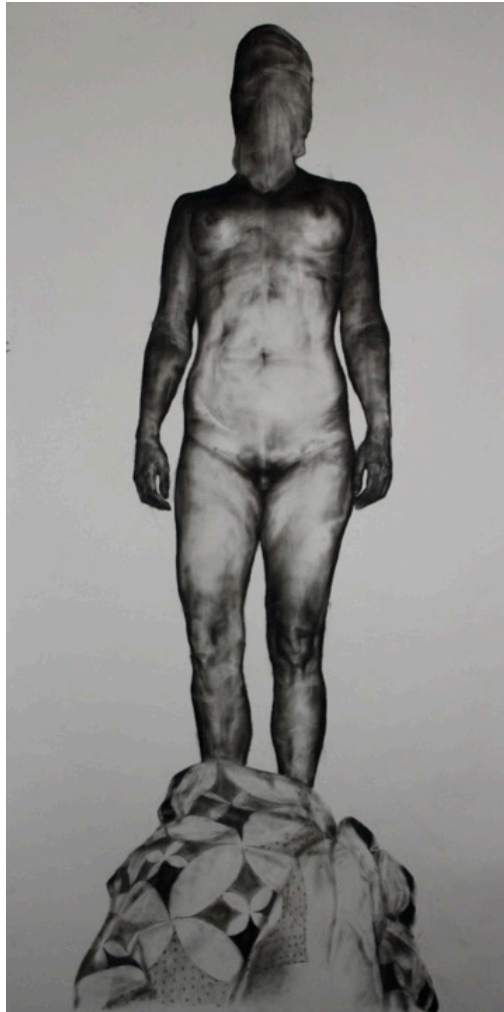


Figure 3, Jonny Cantrell, Untitled, 2011. Charcoal on paper, 42"x84"

Untitled 3 is a drawing of a female form set in a contrapposto pose, with her feet covered by a decorative quilt, and her head bound tightly in cloth. My research found that in the latter part of the nineteenth century nude female models were often masked in order to preserve their anonymity as well as their social virtue, as illustrated by the work of Thomas Eakins. These ideas were antiquated and demeaning, yet fascinating. As with

the Untitled 2, the thinking was how to appropriate these ideas, yet set them against themselves, again using the system created against itself. Objects could be used in a way which still truncated the narrative but they would need to stand in place of the body, never in their relation to the body. The part object could be heightened by further removing its relation to the body through the use of secondary information, as in the case of Untitled 3. By wrapping the figures whole head behind a cloth the artistic functions of her face could be removed from the rest of her body, it could both hide her identity and personality from the viewer, and preserve them as they relate to her own being. This served to remove the head, the personality, of the figure, not only in the sense that her identity was hidden from view, but it also detached the head from the rest of the body, setting it apart from the unclothed body. I was attempting to use an outdated mode of represented identity and appropriating it in order to reclaim the body's cultural significance.

The choice to situate a strong female body in a contrapposto pose, bracketed by two historical symbols that related to the female form, but in doing so put this relationship of elements in a dichotomy. In using the language of the female body positioned in a decidedly male pose with a classical connotation. This positioning plays in direct contradiction to the masking of the figures head. This binding was at odds with the function of the quilt, which also served to create a statuesque figure from its situation within the picture plane causing it to function as a pedestal.

Through the implementation of cloth parts of the body were remade as object, setting these new part objects in relation to the mass of the body which was laid bare, allowing the viewer to determine if the whole of the form was a function of

objectification, and to allow for a questioning of who was objectifying this form, the artist or the viewer.

UNTITLED 4



Figure 4, Jonny Cantrell, Untitled, 2012. Charcoal on paper, 84”x84”

In Untitled 4, cultural constructions of race, gender and sexuality are exposed and put in opposition to each other. A large black man sits comfortably, invitingly, on what

would be a couch which has been removed, legs crossed, his arm draped over negated signs of culture, and he wears a mask of a white girl's face over his own. This idea aligns directly with Frantz Fanon's thought on race from his writings, *Black Skin, White Masks* when he states,

Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief. (Fanon 182)

It is as if forcing a piece of a jigsaw puzzle into the wrong place, leaving all of the connecting pieces damaged at their margins. I wish to demonstrate this damage in the form of the index on the body, through its language and the evidence of scars upon the flesh. The language itself is shown to be in opposition to its own positioning, at one time relaxed, calm and seated, and yet tense and removed in the situating of its hands. These elements are present in Austrian expressionism, by Klimt and Schiele, the calmness of the face positioned against the tension of the hands to express an inner schism. Moreover, the position of the legs suggests a feminine quality in their manner, crossed tightly over the hidden genitals. The hands function in contradiction to each other, one held tense against the body, the other thrown wide in relaxation, removed from the whole of the body by its positioning on a separate sheet of paper. Almost the whole of the left side is left open, suggesting the place of the viewer and their role in the conceptualization

of the work.

Yet, in a continuation of the principles set in untitled 3, objects could mirror the function of the part object which they mask. In this case it is a literal masking of the figure, but with the addition of simulacra in the manner that one face replaces another. The face of the white girl is placed in position of the figures black face, questioning the relationship of these two oppositions and their function as to the intent of the figure. He is at one time both hidden and inviting, a layered contradiction mirroring social views. This line of thought is in direct relation to the work of Gillian Wearing and her implementation of the other through realistic mask. By placing the traditional representation of the personality, the face, directly onto the face of another, identity is called into question.

Here the part objects begin to play against one another, calling into question the nature and intentions of the figure. In using Fanon's application of cognitive dissonance, all of the oppositions must be questioned because of the negation that they direct at each other. These questions raised by cognitive dissonance are intentionally being left open in order for the viewer to be complicit in their outcome.

This aspect of discerning will also lead the viewer to call into question my role as creator of these works. I was forcing the audience to give contemplation to my role as creator of the objects, employing ambiguity to allow for a critique on my intent. At the same time, critiquing the viewers own bias through open-ended use of minimal elements which will allow for the viewer to not only question certain intentions, but the viewers own role in the formulation of the outcome of the work. Here the concerns are aligning with the works of Eric Fischl and his use of the gesture in relation to identity. As Ted

Fullerton writes,

Fischl does not observe with innocent or chaste eyes, but instead responds to moments expressed through the body. *Three Figure Studies* (1994) in watercolor indicate the power of that response. These watercolors, directly executed, translate the figure beyond rendering, and through gesture, elevate and empower it. Supported by light and tone, these elements of containment and release maintain the illusion of a three-dimensional form. Yet, its interpretation deals less with the objective observation than with a sense of the meeting of internal and external. In *Swimmer at Rest* (1995), the figure's unthinkable posture presses the allegorical; however, the face pulls us back by placing a personality, an identity on the figure. (Fullerton)

For Fischl the allegorical notions of identity are also meaningful. By using the body as receptacle for the biased viewer, cultural ideas that are carried by the viewer may be projected upon the figure and his mask.

UNTITLED 5



Figure 5, Jonny Cantrell, Untitled, 2010. Charcoal on paper, 84”x81”

The final drawing of this exhibit is another work on two panels of paper, with a nude female in profile on her hands and knees, and a large quilt draped over her head. Untitled 5 also functions on multiplications and substitutions, and how these two ideas relate to the whole of the body. If the ideas of multiplication and substitution can be

viewed in relations to themselves and each other, then their contradictory nature may be a positive aspect. Contradictory elements within a work of art do not nullify each other, but their relationship may create a new, third territory, in which the viewer may be an active participant. Suzi Gablik has written,

It is important to understand that any remapping of the modern paradigm has both a deconstructive and a reconstructive dimension: they need to be seen not as opposites, with sharp boundaries drawn between them, but as components in a larger process, operating simultaneously like the complementarity principle. The key is to bring the two components into relationship, so that they will not remain poised forever in mutual antagonism. (Gablik 27)

The deconstructive and reconstructive elements that Gablik calls for are represented in Untitled 5 as multiplication and negation. Here the multiplication of the lower part of the form is set against the covering of the head by the quilt in order to draw attention to that which is situated in between, the body. The addition of the lower form is set in contradiction of the hidden identity of the upper form. The use of the quilt, as in Untitled 3, serves as a mark of femininity, but this element is set in contradiction to the multiplication of another symbol of the feminine, her vagina. Both of these elements, the identity and sex, are hidden, with added objects substituted for function. Here again the sex and the mind have been detached from each other through the physical properties of the paper to manifest a Cartesian dualism, as in Untitled 2. The nature of the bodies posturing is a continuation of Untitled 2, in which the figure has now adopted both

positions of the previous work into one ambiguous pose.

Situated inside of these two elements is the body itself in a position which can be characterized as sexual if viewed as submissive. This reading will call into question the objectification of the body through the negation of identity and violent treatment of the reproductive organs, or one in which is a pose of tight containment, holding the two manipulated sections together, and since nothing sexual is being preformed, the reconciliation of the elements will be under the responsibility of the viewer. Both readings must be presented to the viewer, not in order to craft a narrative, but to force the audience to make an ethical decision on the outcome of the body. This forced method of completion of the piece through the viewer will allow he or she to question their own bias which has been formulated based upon their conclusions of my intent. The only way to bring these contradictory elements together, as with what Gablik calls for, is in the ethical mind of the viewer, so it must be set up that the creator of the work may hold all negative, original connotations.

This work, and the use of competing signs, is in a relation to the work of David Salle, and his application of too many signs working all in conjunction with each other, the end result being a painting which functions as white noise. In the paintings of Salle everything is a sign disconnected from its situation of other signs, nothing fits together, forcing the viewer to formulate their own conclusions. However, the work of Salle acts in a different manner than the works in this exhibit because of his use of disparate elements, unconnected through the body. With Salle's paintings the viewer is forced to make connections and conclusions based upon their own experience, yet those ends which the audience arrives at can never be of a personal nature. The aim of this

exhibition that I have presented is to connect these ideas and their relation to the viewer through the selective presentation of elements, and through the shared nature of the body. Salle's work diminishes the meaning of signs through a mass juxtaposition, while the works of this exhibition seeks to negate the sign through substitutions within the body itself in order to speak to the individual viewer.

CONCLUSION

The works presented in this exhibition ask a great deal of the viewer. The audience is asked to navigate the creation of these works and the intent of their creator, often leading the viewer to dissonant qualities. The work will start the sentence which the activated agent must finish.

The system that has been set in this exhibit functions as a basis for all of these works, but should not be read as a finalized statement, but a foundation which has gone into the investigation of the studio practice presented here. The reduced qualities of the work act to allow participation with the viewer, and allow for a biased conclusion. The viewer must supply what is purposefully reduced in the presentation of the work, and this process will allow the audience to be culturally invested in the work. The application of cognitive dissonance through the addition of specific elements and the denial of a traditional artistic resolution will act to reveal cultural myths and challenge biased belief systems.

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