PICKLES, PINEAPPLES,
PLUGS, AND PEOPLE

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by
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For Jean, Ray, Jeanne, and Franz
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INTRODUCTION

During the past two years of graduate study the main influence on my work has been the possibilities inherent in the photographic image, both as a documentation of events and as a framework for exaggeration of objects and the manipulation of objects in space. The synthesis of photography, drawing and the printmaking media, color, space and scale all work to create a framework for the interrelationship of images and ideas. Words act as symbolic clues and inanimate objects are transformed into animate objects.

John Perreault's summation of contemporary art is an adequate definition of the development of my own efforts in art. He states that "Present day art is made in terms of the art that went before, the work of contemporaries, present art needs and personal needs, and ideas about the future of art or what art should be."¹ Although my work has always been strongly directed toward associations with recognizable imagery, it has developed from a formalistic approach, to one that is more strongly related to conceptualism. In a sense, the work has taken an intermediate quality that is a product of an interest in realism and an interest in nominalism.²

¹John Perreault, "Crisco Chair on a Coattail Ride," Village Voice, February, 1974, p. 34.
Using Perreault's summation as a guide, my work is divided mainly into three categories. The first category, "art that went before and the work of contemporaries," consists of lithographic prints that are mainly technical, formal exercises and conceptual experimentations influenced by contemporary printmakers such as Edward Ruscha, Paul Wunderlich, and Claes Oldenburg. The prints that exemplify this group are Two Tits for Louise, Metamorphosis, Molly Brown's Studio, Leonardo's Assemblage, and Pickle Juice. The second category "present art needs and personal needs" is a transitional period for my work, where my main concern is in the development through photo-mechanical means of an interrelationship between images, ideas and words as symbols. These somewhat serial group of prints are Crushed Pineapples, Sliced Pineapples, In Its Own Juice, Nectar of the Fruit, Pineapple Mold, and Bronze Carrot Plugs. The third category "ideas about the future of (my) art" is made up mainly of spray paint and pencil drawings that deal with exaggeration of color and scale and manipulation of objects in space. These are influenced by the distortion inherent in photographic images. Examples of this group are Sliced Pineapple, Pineapple Chunks, Exuding Pineapples, Falling Pineapples, Knobs, View From the Window, The Bathtub, The Bed and The Couch.
ART THAT WENT BEFORE AND THE WORK OF CONTEMPORARIES

My early work as a graduate student was a conglomeration of unrelated ideas that served mostly as a tool for technical proficiency in a relatively new media for myself - lithography. The two prints, Two Tits for Louise and Metamorphosis were mainly experimentations in photolithography and the application of multiple color. My interest in photography at this point developed because of subtle suggestions by my instructor, Ken Farley, and to the addition of photomechanical equipment to the printmaking department.

The prints, Molly Brown's Studio, Leonardo's Assemblage, and Pickle Juice dealt with the photographically reproduced or hand drawn manipulations of everyday environments or objects. The subject matter during this period was influenced for aesthetic and technical considerations by the work of two artist/printmakers, Claes Oldenburg and Paul Wunderlich. I was interested in Claes Oldenburg's work because of the exaggeration of the scale of mass media objects and in Paul Wunderlich's prints because of the distortions of space in the picture plane. The latter print, Pickle Juice, proved to be a starting point for a sense of cohesiveness in my work. In this print, I became much more aware of the possibilities of sensory reaction to images through color and to the possibilities of
photographic manipulation of space through overlays of negative and positive images. The frontal format and shallow, stage-like space of *Pickle Juice* set a precedent for most of the compositions in the prints and drawings that followed.

**PRESENT ART NEEDS AND PERSONAL NEEDS**

A trip to the grocery store and an awareness of words on labels was the turning point for both the imagery and ideas in the subsequent prints. A crushed can of Dole's Crushed Pineapples was sitting on a shelf, and I became fascinated with the duality of the situation and the words on the label. The experience led to the conception of the print Crushed Pineapples, and an awareness of the variety of possibilities using similar concepts.

Marcel Duchamp's conception of the everyday object as art and the ideologies of the Pop Art movement had in many ways set the stage for my reaction to the Dole can and label. John Perreault stated that the basis of Pop Art was "an art style that exploited, extended, and transformed sign systems and codes, mainly ones derived from commercial graphic techniques," and Pop artists had realized that "Brand name products (with their own life span) can evoke lost atmospheres of childhood fantasies."

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of other classes, places, lives." With the Dole can, my first reaction had been to the commercialistic association with labels, how objects had become institutionalized by the companies that produced them. I became aware of the possibilities in their transformation from preconceived images into new considerations of their form and content. The setting for my manipulation of these "institutionalized" images was through photography and the photographic print.

In the series of three prints that followed, Sliced Pineapples, In Its Own Juice, and Nectar of the Fruit, and in the later sequence of similar conceptually-oriented prints, I became the perpetrator of the situation rather than the observer. With photography as a framework using variations in depth of field and in the camera angle, I manipulated and distorted the objects to clarify the duality of label and situation. At this point, I also became much more concerned with the formalistic considerations of exaggerated scale and unrealistic color. In the first two prints of the series, Sliced Pineapples and In Its Own Juice, I was concerned not only with the obvious consideration of words on labels and their correlation with the object, but with the transformation of the inanimate cans and fruit into animate objects through color.

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4 John Perreault, "Classic Pop Revisited," Art in America, March, 1974, p. 64.
In *Sliced Pineapples*, the unfocused green pineapple acquires an animate quality of movement which seeps and flows from the confines of the can. In a similar fashion, the purple in the print *In Its Own Juice* highlights the stagnated conglomeration of grease and the pineapple's lost juices. Probably the most influential use of color for my later work was realized in the final print of the series, *Nectar of the Fruit*. The colors were so "sweet," one could almost taste them. The mood established by this type of color-taste sensation carried over into the two larger prints that followed, *Pineapple Mold* and *Bronze Carrot Plugs*.

There were two major changes in the latter two prints of the pineapple series. The most noticeable change was the larger size of the print. *Sliced Pineapples*, *In Its Own Juice*, and *Nectar of the Fruit* were all approximately 8" x 10" prints. My main concern with these prints had been a conceptual one, and I felt that a smaller format would draw more attention to the label-image relationship than to the Pop Art-like imagery. In the prints *Pineapple Mold* and *Bronze Carrot Plugs*, my considerations were more toward the actual objects themselves, both in detail and in arrangement in space. The second major change was in ideas, from symbolic word associations to a more formalistic approach to imagery. I became interested in the
situation of the cans and the fruit within the composition. *Pineapple Mold* became not only a study in the monumentality of the imagery, but an observation of the animate qualities of pineapples as they begin to age and deteriorate. Again, the use of the color green adds a certain credibility to the documentation of an almost "deceased family" of pineapples. In *Bronze Carrot Plugs*, although there was still a concern for the illusionistically large scale of the cans and compressed space, I became more interested in the inherent voids or plugs that exist in fruits and vegetables. As with doughnuts and their holes, pineapples have noticeable voids that present endless possibilities for food plugs that would fill the negative area and change the pre-existing shape. Although I experimented with this idea in some later prints I never quite resolved my original intentions, and I soon lost interest in the whole concept.

**IDEAS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF (MY) ART**

Although prints have a unique quality that sets them apart from any other media the time and physical energy necessary for their completion is, at times, somewhat overwhelming. After the pineapple series, I felt a need to deal with a media that was more direct, where there was less expended time between idea and final execution. The media I chose was a combination of drawing and spray
painting with stencils. This technique was closely related to the final appearance of my prints but required less involvement with the time consuming mechanics of printmaking. Although these drawings were hand rendered rather than photographically produced, they strongly influenced my use of the camera's ability to distort space and document events.

The first four drawings executed through the above technique, Sliced Pineapple, Pineapple Chunks, Exuding Pineapples and Falling Pineapples, were a direct extension of the formal and conceptual considerations of the preceding series of prints. In the drawings, I was concerned not only with the monumentality of the image, but also with the development of anthropomorphic qualities in the cans. In Sliced Pineapple, the pineapple oozes from the depths of a slightly luminescent container like an extension of intestine. The pineapples in Exuding Pineapples project from the can like so many disconnected tongues and slowly creep over the frontal plane of the drawing. The cans in all the drawings are inanimate objects with personalities and their pineapples are transformed into disemboweled organs.

The two drawings that followed the above series, Knobs and View From the Window, were transitional works, not necessarily in concept, but in subject matter.
Instead of dealing with the monumentality and animate qualities of cans and pineapples I began to distort and exaggerate the space through the use of photographically influenced figures situated in a very shallow frontal plane. The compositional devices used in these two drawings and in the three that followed are closely related to those applied in the Japanese-derived work of the early Twentieth century, e.g., Mary Cassatt, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas. As in these early works, my drawings "emphasize the two-dimensional picture plane by placing (the) figure close to the foreground in a confined and ambiguous space with vertical and slightly diagonal linear elements, and with a high horizon compressing perspective rather than defining it." The technical execution of the relatively flat areas of color in these last drawings is a direct carry-over from my experiences with color application in printmaking.

Although formally Knobs and View From the Window are very similar they do differ in intent. Knobs is not only involved with shape and surface similarities but also acts as a social comment on a slang word associated with women's breasts. The breasts become as impersonally functional as the faucets. On the other hand,

View From the Window converts the figure through angle distortions into a massive mother-earth image that visually flows out through the blank window area.

In the last series of drawings, The Bathtub, The Couch, and The Bedroom, there is a somewhat radical shift of intent from the directly preceding drawings. Although I still am interested in monumentality of shape and relatively shallow space, the formats of the drawings are closely derived from their photographic sources. The distortions created by the photographs transform the figures into, at times, grotesque configurations of faces and limbs. The use of the camera also helps to instill the drawing with a sense of a documented moment in time. The figure is suspended in the act of rising out of the depths of a bathtub, crawling from between the sheets of a bed and sinking into the folds of materials on a soft couch. The use of more subtle colors in these works reinforce this delicate illusion of suspended time. Conceptually, these drawings deal with the environment as an extension of the figures, where the figures seem to emerge from their surroundings. This mood is especially evident in the first two drawings, The Bathtub and The Bed. Although this quality is still apparent in the last drawing, The Couch, the figure emerges more through changes in color and shape rather than through an illusion of movement.
CONCLUSION

In reviewing my work of the past two years, I am aware that my involvement with the photographic image has served a duality of purpose. Not only has it enabled me to expand an interest in documentation and manipulation of objects through photomechanical means in my prints, but it has also served as a "sketchbook" in the realization of my drawings. By using photography as a framework I have been able to resolve my conceptual and formalistic concerns, and to develop closer physical and philosophical relationships with the graphic media.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

important artists make jokes
good artists laugh at jokes
questionable artists haven't got time to laugh.  

art is something made as art by artists
artists are people who call themselves artists
artists made art because they want to
sometimes people do things for strange reasons.  


7Gerald Ferguson, Axioms and Generalities, mimeographed book. (Halifax, Canada: 1972).