MARASCHINO, MARASCHINO: 
TWO FISTED TRUE PRINTMAKING

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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By:
Robert F Stephens II, B.A., B.F.A.

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Master's Examination Committee:
Charles Massey Jr., Adviser
Ruth King
Steve Thurston

Approved by

Department of Art
ABSTRACT

Topics important to my art work are the mall culture, prefabrication of our environment, the spiraling nature of consumer gluttony, and the lure of the artificial. This sets the stage for some of the content in my work and functions as a reference point.

These topics are explored through specific conflicts within my body of work. These conflicts include man-made vrs. machine made, printed vrs. spontaneous, distanced vrs. emotional, and critical vrs. humane. Much of my work uses a form of criticism that symbolically reenacts the offense criticized as opposed to merely stating that it is wrong.

I use properties in my art work ( such as line quality, color, print quality, figure /ground relationships, humor, installation, and comparison ) to support my major topics and to help in my endeavor to make my work function in a way that goes beyond the sterile, boring way most art functions. I do not want my art to sit on its butt doing nothing. Most of the things I make are props to be used in either initiating action or thought.
Dedicated to David DeMello, who saved me.

I wish I could dedicate something better to him.
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VITA

November 27, 1972 .............................................. Born - Marietta, Georgia

1990 - 1995 ....................................................... Bachelor of Fine Arts, Printmaking

Magna Cum Laude

Southern Methodist University

1990 - 1995 ....................................................... Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy

Magna Cum Laude

Southern Methodist University

1996 - Present ..................................................... Graduate Teaching Assistant

The Ohio State University

August 1998 ....................................................... Monoprint Workshop Supervisor

Essex School for the Gifted

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art
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CHAPTER 1

THEMATIC ISSUES
INTRODUCED

The following chapter is only a set of clues. Like a legend or a key, it will provide information about general themes in my work and will show the tone of my work (a sporadic intertwining of related ideas.)

One of these specific themes is that of the jar. The jar is essentially a barrier that keeps “stuff” from other “stuff”. They are pre-existing environments that shape their contents. When one pours something into a jar, it conforms to the structure of the jar.

Another theme is the mall. Growing up in Dallas is much like what I would imagine growing up in a mall would be. The whole city is like some utopian market place of the future. It is a mall without enough benches. Even the landscape seems to be mere filler between shops. People in Dallas shamble like zombies, shopping and consuming in the space of time between working because they were told at some point that shopping and consuming are supposed to be fun. Squinty eyed, like moles, they feel vaguely dissatisfied. Some part of them knows that something is wrong, that something is broken, but they just do not know how to fix it. Their feet hurt and there is no where to sit.
Bench allotment in malls is meticulously thought out. Mall owners want to promote shopping, but they do not want it to be too comfortable. The elderly with little disposable income and other dead-beats need to be chased off. The shoppers are treated like undesirable refugees or the pilgrims of which Saint Augustine always spoke.

Teenagers present a more complicated problem for mall owners. They are young and vibrant so they will not be swayed as easily as the feeble boned elderly. While teens are the mall’s chief patron, they are also more likely to loiter and clog up the smooth stream of consumption with shoplifting and vandalism. The relationship between mall owners and teenagers is a strained love/hate relationship, similar to the relationship between “townies” and tourists.

In high school, Julie Braken and I would drive around at night anytime we could gain access to a car. She would usually drive while I would dangle my arm out the window. The wind would feel cool under my forearm. We would usually drive until we could find some patch of land that was not plastic. She would be smoking cloves absentmindedly, and I would be happy that we were moving but sort of sad too because there really was no where to go and nothing to do. These night drives were like trying to scratch your back with mittens on. They sort of helped.

A jar is a pre-existing environment that shapes its contents. Like the airport, they are pre-fabricated without much interest in what specifically is put into them. Jars provide an outside imposition that constrains its contents with no sort of judgement about what those contents are. The contents are forced to conform to the jar, having no substantial structure in itself. The implications about personal identity are obvious.

Here is a good mall to talk about: the Galleria in Dallas. It is five stories tall, has air conditioning, neon lights and an ice rink. The floors are thoroughly clean. Since it has not gone through an economic decline yet, everything in it is brand new and polished to a
shine. While at the Galleria, one can forget that jilt and pollution exist. Shoppers can forget that they are in Texas. In the Galleria, the shopper is in every sterile mall in the world at the same time. Thanks to tightened security, one can also forget about homeless vagrants and other “riff raff.”

My grandmother is mean spirited but determined. She lives in a swampy, mud soaked town named Kinder. People in Kinder wish they had a mall like the Galleria around them. Everything in Kinder is falling apart, coated in rust and moss and unemployment. The closest mall is one story tall and is an hour away. While it is not clean or polished, it does have nationally recognized franchises in it such as WaldenBooks and The Gap. These stores seem like fragments of civilization just barely hanging on like plaque. Viewing this mall after seeing the spotless Galleria is equivalent to Charlton Heston discovering the remains of the Statue of Liberty at the end of “Planet of the Apes.”

My grandmother refuses to go to that mall. She spends most of her time jarring preserves. On some intuitive level, she views their mall as a colossal failure.

Some people use jars to preserve something by isolating it from the world. Like putting art in a museum, when one seals something up in a jar they are trying to remove it from the corruption of the world. By protecting it, they render the object untouchable or abstract, like an idea or a word or a televised image.

The trouble with this is that jars are also like tombs. Attempting to escape death, jars emulate it. They create an artificial or false death. Jars separate “stuff” From the world, just like death does. It is sad, really.

Shopping at Kchl’s with Krista Grecco the other day, I was struck by how many bulky kitchen items to which I was attracted. It took me a while to figure out why: my kitchen is pathetic. The glistening metal utensils were arranged like musical notes on the
shelves and beckoned to me precisely because my kitchen is not spacious. They offered a surrogate for having a big kitchen. I could become the type of person who would have enough room for a ToastMaster 2000 or an oversized ceramic Big Bird Cookie Jar. The Toast Master 2000 sells the idea of a bigger kitchen. It sells an imaginary, hoped-for environment to contain it. Unfortunately, if I buy it, I will make my kitchen smaller not bigger, and thus increase my desire for a bigger kitchen. I will then have to get another bigger surrogate.

Posters at shoe stores always have models who are wearing their shoes in sporty vacation spots. The models are always either wearing their shoes in a canyon or hiking through the woods. Occasionally they are in a corn field or frolicking through tall green grass. It really does not matter as long as the environment is a hoped-for, perfect one. The models are never pictured using their shoes in a mall.

As a printmaker who paints a lot, I have noticed that paintings, like wall plates, work in a similar way to the Toast Master 2000. The painting is a substitute for having a luxurious amount of empty wall space (1.1, 1.2, 1.3,1.4). The bigger the painting, the more desirable, and the more expensive because it implies more space to hang it. Again it is a trick, because unless one actually has a luxurious amount of wall space, the paintings look cramped and thus reinforce the pathetic nature of the apartment from which one is trying to escape. Again this brings on the desire for more empty wall space. It is like desperately trying to patch up the holes of a sinking ship with newspaper. That is why there will always be a need for art, because art, like the mall, creates a need for itself. It slips through our fingers like water.
CHAPTER 2

JARS

This chapter is about my Master of Fine Arts exhibition. It is about what I did and why I did it. Chapter Three will explain how I got to this point with my work, my process, and my reasoning. Chapter Four will speculate on what the future holds for my work.

My M.F.A. show consisted of forty two hand printed, hand carved jars. These jars were printed onto slabs of wood and then carved out like low relief sculpture. I poured shiny enamel paint into the groves of these carvings (2.1). Part of them were displayed in a grid format similar to the way plates are displayed or the way prizes are set up at carnival booths (2.2). In addition, I made three giant jars, using the same process, that were eight foot by eight foot (2.3, 2.4, 2.5).

I will explain how this work came into existence and pinpoint how this exhibition fits into my body of work as a whole.

POINT OF ORIGIN

I found myself in Columbus Ohio going to unfamiliar grocery stores. While among the rows of jarred maraschino cherries in the dead of winter, I noticed something. The florescent light must have hit them just right, must have shone through them at just the right angle because, suddenly they were ablaze like a wondrous fire or some sort of beautiful radioactive isotopes. Washed in the soft amber glow of their red syrupy light,
I felt serene and tranquil like I was standing in front of a fireplace. It had been a long, dark winter, and the jars seemed like rare exotic fish. They were better than fish though because fish just happened by accident. Someone made these happen.

Ohio is depressing. It is grey and prison-like for most of the year. The sky is usually a dull graphite color, but on good days it looks like asphalt or mud. Like a house plant straining to face the sun, I began to haunt the grocery stores around town. It was there that I found sanctuary in the rows of color. The stores were brighter and better than anything nature could ever hope to provide.

Everything there seemed to glow and vibrate with unearthly hues. The jars gleamed like polished gems. The plastic detergent bottles dotted the shelves like oddly cut rhinestones or cake decorations. This experience of noticing the carnivalesque side of commerce partly inspired me to work on my “jar project”.

I walked through the market in the same state of awe that one would have while walking through a carnival midway [2.6, 2.7]. I noticed that the rest of the slow-eyed shoppers still trudged along oblivious to the freak show. They were so accustomed to the displays of multiple objects, the patterns and colors, that they could not appreciate the wonder of it all. I began to think that if everything in the grocery store were a hand-crafted isolated art object, they would notice.

So much of our culture is mass produced that most objects are copies of some unknown original. The thought of every item in a grocery store not being made by a machine boggles the mind.

WHAT I DID ABOUT IT

In my Master of Fine Arts exhibition, I decided to make forty two handmade “jars” [2.1]. I use quotation marks because these objects are really depictions of jars
printed on blocks of wood. These slabs will not be treated like regular paintings because they are difficult to hang. They are heavy and meant to rest on little, individual shelves. The jars are twenty by twenty four inches big. The jar images themselves appear to be very crude childish drawings with black heavy line. I chose this style of drawing because it is so linked with the artist’s hand and helps reinforce the important idea that these are original objects.

The more one inspects the grid (a structure very much like the display shelves in the grocery store), the more likely one will realize that several of the jars repeat themselves (2.8). That is because I did not draw them; I screen printed each of the jars in a tiny edition of four. I then began to carve out each of these prints, (making them into printing blocks but only after the printing is completed) turning them into relief sculptures [2.9]. I carved the negative space out to form grooves and then poured colored, enamel polyurathane into these grooves. The translucent enamel paint looks like syrupy candy [2.10] or stained glass windows. Certainly these characteristics add a layer of the “mall” or store association.

There is a deliberate confusion between what is individual or unique and what is printed. There is also a deliberate confusion between a finished print image and its matrix.

There are two components to any print: the image and the matrix. The matrix is the object one makes in order to print an image. The image is the finished copy or print. Usually the matrix is a metal plate or piece of wood, and it almost never looks like what the image is. When I was carving out the jars, several people asked me how I was intending to print them after I poured paint into them. They made this mistake because the carved jars are like a relief printing matrix. I could conceivably print more jars from these carved prints, but instead I poured paint into them, making that impossible.
There is something perverse in this process. By pouring this sticky, alluring paint all over these objects and by turning them into hand crafted unique items, I am making them more appealing. I am also committing a form of vandalism. I am ruining a matrix to make these. It is the equivalent to clogging up the gears of a machine with bubble gum. Pouring paint insures that the blocks will never be used to make prints. It destroys the block’s potential to ever create. It is a creative and destructive act at the same time.

The carving and pouring defeats the whole purpose of printmaking. After printing the image, I am going to the trouble of hand carving them all out, which seems counterproductive, and contradictory, if one were only using print as a utilitarian end.

The jars have an eerie balance between handmade and commercial. The paints are slick and smooth. I deliberately painted them with turkey basters to avoid having brush marks or other tell- tell signs of human touch. However I left the drawn lines as human as possible, thus creating another visual and conceptual contradiction.

Pouring paint was important because I wanted these wooden objects to function like jars. A jar is essentially a container that separates "stuff" from other "stuff". It is a lot like a body in this way. When I first decided to do jars, I poured polyurathanes and enamels onto paper and then drew the jar shape around them [2.11]. While I liked the results, I was unsatisfied because it was an inverse of what a jar really was. The line that drew the jar was at the mercy of the jar’s contents instead of the other way around. I wanted a physical barrier to hold the paint back so I started experimenting with caulk. The first caulk painting I did was of a cityscape [2.12]. The caulk looked like icing and kept the candy colored paint in its place. I took this one step further with the jars because the act of carving made the lines stronger and more oppressive and made troughs or valleys to pour the enamel into. This process seemed much more fitting to the containment function of jars because the physical barriers kept the interior paint from
the exterior paint and thus functioned like a real jar. These objects came to be both
depictions of jars and actual jars at the same time. They sit and take up space like a real
jar; they contain and separate things; and yet they are not jars; they cannot be used
again, and they refer to jars.

Along with the forty-two small jars, I also made three eight foot by eight foot
jars with the same process (2.3,2.4,2.5). I had two reasons for doing these. First, it
casted the jars to be roughly body sized, thus reinforcing the comparison between jars
and bodies or the human element. Secondly, it hinted at this idea of prefabrication or
mass production because the jars are on planks of prefabricated wood.

The color in the jars is meant specifically to lure and trap a viewer, like the
color used by abductors or commercials. I want these jars to be desirable, but I also
want them to be bulky and cumbersome. I want the act of purchasing these jars to be a
more exaggerated reenactment of the Toast Master 2000 cycle I described in the first
chapter. The jars create a need, yet in order to display them, one has to physically
damage their walls. Two of my patrons keep four of my jars on a shelf in their living
room above some giant ceramic flamingoes. They like their jars a lot, but being elderly,
they complained about how heavy and high maintenance they were. This is a type of
criticism with which I have been experimenting and will discuss more later.
CHAPTER 3

WHAT PRINTMAKING HAS DONE TO ME

This chapter will explore how my work process and reasoning have changed over the last few years. My use of color and line has changed considerably. A lot of time will be spent dealing with issues of printmaking. Besides giving me a structure, thinking of print issues has greatly enriched my work. Print issues can provide both a studio narrative and better insights into what has led me to this point.

OSU PRINT HILBILLY

We need some back story. I think I should explain why I do not consider myself a painter and talk about my previous experience as an under skilled “print hillbilly.”

Last night, Julie asked me why I was not a painter. She had a point. I was painting, as in I was physically using paint. I had not done a traditional print in months. Outside of the fact that I am not an alcoholic drug addict, I do tend to fit the stereotypical painter mode.

Despite all this, I do think printmaking is crucial to my development and process. And it is lucky for me that “printmaking” is a conceptual territory rather than just a skilled practice.

When I first arrived in the print department at The Ohio State University, I felt extremely inadequate. My undergraduate department had a tiny intaglio print lab, and
while there were not chickens running all over the shop, it did not have the yankee sophistication that print shops here have. It did not really stress “print” issues.

I felt like a spy who had pulled the wool over everyone’s eyes. Given my glaring deficiencies, I knew I had to start conceptualizing and quick.

Printmaking as Necessary Evil

I spent a lot of my time questioning why I was printing in the first place. As an undergraduate and for all general purposes, my prints were much more decisive and bold than my paintings. I told myself that I did prints because the method of drypointing or etching a line forced my line to do things I could not get any other way. Carving a line out of wood, for example, made unique marks that I did not know how to get any other way, and I used printmaking as a utilitarian means to an end. Printmaking was a necessary evil.

While I think this is partly true, in the course of studying here, I have come to believe that the reason for the discrepancy between my printed work and my painted work is the delayed process involved with making a repeatable matrix. Printmaking is the kind of medium which forces me to make committed images because it does not allow me to “pussy-foot” around. I have to be a bully to get an image. With painting, I could spend all day just pushing paint around, making amorphous blurry shapes. When I compare one of my undergraduate paintings with one of my undergraduate prints (3.1,3.2), the painting is vague, murky and uncommitted. The figure and ground are blurred together which is a sign that I was too afraid to actually assert myself into it. It
never got beyond being responsive. The print is much more assertive. The figure and
ground are clearly separated, and that is because editing images leaves no room for
unproductive accidents. If something accidentally happens, like a smear of ink, one has to
purposely claim it in order to print it. Blurred, murky imagery with poor figure ground
distinction typically indicates an ego that does not want to assert itself onto its
surroundings. I did some paintings (3.3) during this time that show, on some intuitive
level, that I knew this because I was employing print techniques in my painting (like
drypointing and making gauges.) This seems to indicate that I unconsciously had the
desire to transpose some of the rigid structure of printmaking onto a more structureless
and amorphous medium. This realization is probably the most important thing that print
has given me. Now when I do paintings, I use an opaque projector to approximate some of
the rigid structure that I had imposed on me in printmaking.

It took me a while to realize that I was using printmaking as a kind of structuring
device, and I spent a lot of time following other conceptual territories that print offers.
At different points in my graduate school career, I have thought of: printing as a
disposable anti-art utilitarian pursuit; printing as a filter; and printing as a way of
layering information. While these did not fit me exactly, I learned a lot from each
exploration.

**Exploration One**
**Print as A Disposable Anti-Art Utilitarian Pursuit:**

By my second quarter, I was not particularly happy with any of my single
images. The only way I could force myself to make more was to think of them as props
that would be used later for something else. Luckily, printmaking is well suited for this kind of exploration, given its history as a subversive tool of revolution and criticism.

Some Print History

Propaganda and information were made available in a radically democratic fashion with the advent of print media. By its nature, printing seemed to run counter to the fetish system of individual privately owned imagery because a print is always a copy. If one wanted to own the original from which the prints are made, they were out of luck because the matrixes looked nothing like the images they produced.

The coming of the Print Revival in the Twentieth Century seemed in many ways to veer off from this origin in its efforts to legitimize printmaking as “Art” with a capital “A”. People were now treating prints as valuable fetish art objects like paintings, and the prices grew to be astronomical. Fine art prints were not for public consumption; they were to be matted and framed in galleries and museums like butterflies under glass.

in a pseudo-Marxist way, I came up with a few projects that built on top of this reasoning. Although I later drifted from this kind of thinking, it taught me a lot about the nature of criticism.

The most direct exploration of this was a project I called “The Kitten Urban Renewal Project" (3.4, 3.5 ). For this project I printed some lithographs of cute kittens on sticker paper. Above the kittens the print proclaimed that "This Site is Declared Officially Cute!" by K.U.R. (Kitten Urban Renewal Project.) Along with these oversized stickers was a pamphlet explaining how the stickers were meant to be used.
They would not be hung in swanky museums. They would be hung by their owners in a specific economically deprived, high crime section of Columbus as a method of solving urban blight. The kittens, with their bulbous heads and big eyes would bring out the native’s instinctive motherly instincts. The kittens themselves would make other people driving through these neighborhoods with their car doors locked feel more at ease. This increased ease would lead to an economic boom as more and more suburban residents felt comfortable while exploring this section of town. It promised to transform crack houses, illegal abortion clinics, and plain ugly people into things deemed “Officially Cute.” That had to do something for their self image. Increased self image would also lead to confidence and eventually jobs and business.

Of course the project was a criticism of ineffective efforts to help the under-class, but it was also interesting in terms of colonialism. Colonizers seldom thought of themselves as barbaric oppressors. They usually told themselves that aside from spreading decease and slaughtering villages, they were generally making life for the colonized better. They were saving them with Christianity. They were introducing high culture and art. The thing I liked most about the “Kitten Urban Renewal Project” was that I found normally, very liberal minded people ( who would oppose colonization ) very “gung-ho” to participate in this project. I did this for the participants so they could experience a neighborhood that they normally would not and would experience what it is like to commit an act of transgression or vandalism. The prints were more a means to facilitate a performance art piece than they were to exist as useless “art” objects.

I had a few reservations about this piece. Others also criticized it ( not within the
art department, interestingly enough). The criticism ran along certain lines: if I was really concerned about the plight of the people, why not do something more substantial; if I was trying to make a point, why do it at the expense of people who are already downtrodden; why not do this renewal in an affluent neighborhood?

I considered that option, but it did not seem to have the stinging bite that I wanted. I wanted it to be critical, but I wanted the criticism to sit close to home. I wanted the participants to symbolically enact the perceived offense. What I learned from this piece is a method of operation which I will call for lack of a better term, "New Criticism."

New Criticism

What I mean by "New Criticism" is a way of criticizing that enacts the injustice rather than merely representing it and claiming it is bad. The "Kitten Urban Renewal Project" was an act of colonization and class warfare, yet it was charming enough to get normally, reasonable liberals to commit an act of transgression at the expense of the underclass.

"New Criticism" also plays marginally into my Mcdonald’s pieces as well (3.6.) This section of my show contains a large quantity of canned goods. These goods have handmade labels with the Mcdonald’s-like trade mark logo on them. On the back, I claim to have invented Mcdonalds, as well as claiming responsibility for Coca Cola, Big Macs and Disney. I copyrighted them all under my name. I have also planned on making homemade coupons for Mcdonalds. These coupons, drawn in crayon, would give the user permission to have a free hamburger or large fry. I grant them permission with the
authority of being the founder of McDonalds. I wanted the piece to talk a lot about identity and ownership. The McDonald "M" is so part of our visual landscape that it seems ridiculous that they claim ownership of it. They are afflicting us all the time with it. The M is part of the alphabet, therefore it seems silly to be copyrighted.

Instead of just talking about corporate ownership, I am actively committing copyright infringement on a grand scale. I am choosing companies that have a long history of suing little people (Disney, McDonald, Scientologists etc.) and I am even sending people to use my coupons at McDonalds to see what happens. Most people will not try to use them, but the idea is for the art work to function in some way to enact thinking about what we may take as a matter of course.

I had hoped that the "Jars" would work in a similar way to the "Kitten Urban Renewal Project." I wanted to recreate the weird consumption cycle that I talk about in the preface. I do not think it did, but that is not such a bad thing. In fact, it is better because it did not work as directly as the Kitten Urban Renewal Project.

Before I get to that, let me explain what I was thinking. In order to recreate the consumption cycle, I needed two components at work in the "Jars": I needed something to make them alluring and desirable and something to make them burdensome.

For the first component, I am relying heavily on color and paint quality as well as the apparent handmade nature of them. The color is unnatural, artificial and candy-like. The fact that the paint is reasonably toxic (and looks that way) adds tension to this desirability. The handmade quality was to make them unique and individual. Like my individual images, I started thinking of properties of a piece of art, such as color or line,
as having a specific function. For example, I used to use color in a very sparse way, and only then out of necessity. It was a variable that I once did not really want to deal with, and when I occasionally flirted with vibrant colors, the works were unsuccessful because the color's function was not thought out. Now, color is a huge aspect of my work and the function of color is wrapped up in the concepts of trapping, gluttony, opulence, and artifice.

Color

Most of the color I use is vivid and artificial looking, like candy. When one thinks of candy, its appeal is its total artifice.

When something is artificial, like rubber models of food or plastic Christmas trees, it is removed from decay and death. It is a preserved version, an isolated thing that does not have to obey the laws of the world. With a plastic Christmas tree, one not only avoids messy pine needles, but they can also get their tree in a variety of resplendent colors not offered by a miserly and puritanical nature. Disneyland is a perfect example of the flight from death and decay. The artificial offers us a world that is totally stable, unchanging and controlled by man. For this reason, it appeals to us. Artificial color on some level offers us all of these connotations and hence is desirable.

The artificial has a double edge to it though. Rubber models of food can not really be eaten. The closer an artificial object comes to escaping death (and hence the more desirable it is,) the more removed and unusable it is. Artificial grass looks great, but how satisfying is it? In fact the artificial tends to promote even further feelings of
unease and dissatisfaction. We can see more clearly the transient corrupt nature of the world better because of the contrast. This unintentional anxiety creates a need for more artifice which of course creates more anxiety. It is a downward cycle that perpetuates itself.

This comes really close to my theme of gluttony. The gluttony cycle starts with an absence. A person is missing something crucial and not having the means to fill that emptiness, gets suckered into consuming an item that promises fulfillment and yet denies it, thus starting a progressively worse cycle. The clearest way to explain this is to return to the candy metaphor. The appeal of brightly colored candy is contradicted because it offers nothing in terms of substance or nutrition. In a sense it is a trap.

To me the color I use works like a trap as well. It is slathered onto my work, bejeweling it like decorations on a christmas tree. It becomes a seductive surface that can be used in several ways. The most obvious connection is that of a stranger offering candy to children. Candy refers to childhood because brightly colored foods appeal to young children. Who else would really want to put a neon blue object in their mouth? It works as a lure. It helps provide a kind of distance, a way of making an unpleasant fact palatable. I have used color to make unpalatable topics like carnal pornography aesthetic (3.7, 3.8). It offers a candy-coated world of stability and hints at an escape from the horror of the rotting earth.

The color and shiny gloss of the paint make the “jars” desirable and fulfill the first component of how these “jars” function. Secondly the “jars” are printed on heavy pieces of wood with no visible way to hang them without selves. Anyone who decides to
purchase, trade or beg for one will have to build shelves and mess up their walls in order to display them properly.

**Exploration Two:**
**Print as Filter**

A second property of print that I have long thought about is its extreme indirectness and distance. While it may have the illusion of spontaneity, print has several steps removed from what is depicted. Colors are separated into different layers. The image to be printed has to be drawn backwards. Printmaking offers a “cool down” time. There is a lengthy gap of time in between conception and execution that tends to make even the most impulsive decisions more calculated and cold.

This weird rhythm is perfect for mirroring gaps or distances needed between the audience and a work, especially if that work is dark or critical. Printing works as a way of distancing an image, just like humor or tragedy does.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING DISTANT**

Critical work or tragic work needs mediators or what I call an appropriate distance. The structure of the “Tragic” is similar to the concept of the “Sublime.” People will not stand for the “Tragic” or the “Critical” unless they are rendered safe. The appeal of tragedy is that it offers a thrill but no real danger. It shows human suffering as having cosmic importance. The form of the “Tragic” is to control and twist the cruelty of happenstance into an artistic form that seems meaningful and poetic.
Buffers or mediators offer this form. In a way, to make something "Tragic" by the strict definition of tragedy, it is necessarily to make it artificial and distant.

Humor is one of those buffers. It provides a sense of calloused removal. People like the humorous position because the humorous position is the position of someone outside the situation. Most people leap at the chance to remove themselves from this veil of tears. Humor reasserts that the rules of the world do not apply to them. The humorous person is outside the world. They are artificial.

Humor is not taken seriously. It is frivolous. Treated like an outsider or child, humor has a certain freedom to it. Humor, as outsider, is subversive and tends to trick people into looking at something longer than they would if it were earnest and serious. Humor is cerebral and prevents sentimentality.

Two examples of my work that use this are “Hiro Shi Yo-Yo Ma” (3.9) and “In Loving Memory”(3.10). “Hiro shi yo-yo ma" is a very callous, very cold blooded print using word play to address issues about the dropping of the A bomb. " In loving Memory" was a print made a few weeks after Lady Di’s death. The print itself is structured much like a greek tragedy because all the action takes place off the frame. Plus, note the regal, pale purple. Both of these prints take worldly news events and transform them into something like art by removing so much from their original intensity.

I will also point out that “jars” are also a method of removal. While I am talking about the “jars”, let me explain how this removed process of printing has effected their line quality and meaning.
THE LINE

My line has always been fairly consistent in my work. At first glance, it seems very spontaneous, brutish and childish. The line is rooted specifically in my body and how my body tends to make marks and thus automatically involves the concept of a specific artist's involvement in the work. I will call this concept the "Artist's Hand".

The "Artist's Hand" works to provide an appropriate distance in my work. If an idea is attached to a specific person, it is less threatening because it is more like an opinion. The artist or author is a filter. Just as Romantic painters used to include surrogate viewers within their landscapes to shield the actual viewer, an artist's overt involvement in a piece of work also helps shield the viewer. He/she stands in between the viewer and what is presented as a mediator.

The fact that my line appears very childish also helps cushion some of the more critical nature of my work. In some ways this childishness works as a trap similar to color. People tend to romanticize children and their sincerity. They also do not tend to pay much heed to what they say because it is usually just babble, or at best a few good minutes of television filler on shows like "Candid Camera" or "Kids say the Darndest Things!"

Children are also interesting in these terms because as outsiders in society, they are not really held with the same accountability that real "people" have. As such, they are freer to openly air their opinions because they are seldom taken seriously by mainstream culture. Look at the classic fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes." The only one who could tell the truth was the outsider child who had nothing to lose, being at
the bottom of the food chain. Implicit in all of this, of course, is the assumption that an outsider perspective can shed new and more probing light on things than an insider perspective. A child's voice or mark seems to be a fairly good metaphor for outsider status in general whether that outside status be race, sexual orientation, religion or economic status.

Aside from providing a specific voice that helps facilitate social criticism, my lines also bring out issues of authenticity, spontaneity and deception. While my line appears spontaneous and haphazard, it very rarely is. In my work process, I usually loosely draw an object about twenty times before I select one to use. Then I blow it up, and trace it a few more times before I can print it. Several of the marks on my silkscreens appear to have been made very sloppily with a fat paintbrush, but in fact, I carefully traced those lines in with a tiny brush. In some ways the printing process works as an editing process. While my lines appear to be fairly sincere and spontaneous, they are really removed, artificial and deliberate. What does this mean? I think that it starts to scratch the surface of a few issues about artificiality, control and individuality. Printing works as an editing device; it helps me make apparently exuberant spontaneous lines which are really cold and calculated.

Exploration Three:

Print as Layering

Lastly, I experimented with print as a way of layering information. I use the word layering the same way I would use the word comparison. When I first got here, I really wanted to tackle issues stemming from a preoccupation with my homosexuality
and how much of me was mere reaction to my environment. This led me to do some works
were I tried to use exterior objects placed near other things to change there meaning. A
good example of a failed attempt to do this are my relief prints from my first quarter.
These prints depict old, ugly people that I place next to toys and candy to see if the
products they consume change the way one would read them as people. I gave one ugly
woman flowers to turn her into the beloved. I wanted to turn these miserable wretches
into the kind of people who would eat a big lolipop or hold a fat teddy bear.

This sort of comparison or layering has been with me a long time. Even in
academic papers, I would resort to this sort of comparative / parallel reasoning. I wrote
several papers comparing old philosophical theories with crappy pop culture movies
(such as showing how the movie “Speed” is really an argument against God’s existence.)

It followed that I started creating collages where I would place my images
together to force a comparison, like a donut with a wedding ring (3.11) or “Tide”
bottles and breasts. I used my images as props that were activated when placed next to
other images or stimulated ideas, just like I was using the prints from the “Kitten
Urban Renewal Project” as props to criticize and stimulate ideas.

Then, something happened, and I figured out a new form of comparison. In the
previous work, the comparison was always between two separate objects or two separate
images. Now, I found myself making comparisons within one object. The shape that I had
drawn would function as two separate things, and elicit a comparison that way.

This idea got planted in my head when I noticed that in my undergraduate prints, I
would use the same shapes to depict different things. For example, I drew teeth and
bombs the same way. When I figured this out, the comparison added much more content to the images. The tooth, like the body, was merely a bomb waiting to go off.

I also noticed that I included a lot of word play, scratching out letters of words to create new words. The discrepancy between the two words was the content: “Crave” became “Cave”; “Person” became “Prison”; “The Best” became “Thebes”; and “Id” became “I.D.”

I really started exploiting this in my first silkscreen class. Here are some examples:

• "Mc love" - This print is red and yellow and appears at first glance to be of a red heart on a yellow background. The longer one looks at it, however, the image changes and the yellow negative space becomes the positive space. The image can now be read as of a yellow Mc Donald “M” on a red background. The image is equating love with fast food commodity.

• Butt heart - This series of silkscreens show what appears to be misshapen hairy hearts, printed in bright candy colors. But the Hearts also vaguely resemble breasts, or testicles or butts. Again this image is showing that love (hearts) is synonymous with animalistic sexual drive.

• Penis to language - I even did some sketches where I drew penis’s on lined paper. Thus sexual organs were put in direct comparison to language. They both are references. What this implies is that words, like certain body parts, are arbitrary symbols which refer to abstract concepts. The word “D.O.G.” has nothing to do
with dogness, but we connect the sign with its reference. The piece questions what the body part refers to.

This sort of reasoning made it easier for me to read the contradictory nature of "Jars" as both preservers and as destroyer.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

I have been thinking a lot since my M.F.A. show about the future of my art work. I speculate that whatever I do in the future will involve multiple objects, have a grid like structure and deal specifically with handmade objects versus mass produced objects.

The grid of “jars”, the simple jars on shelves, the very large jars, plus the McDonalds cans were presented to be aware of a number of icons in our culture. The grids are like packed shelves in grocery or toy stores. The very large jars act as billboards. The shelves and Cans act as the pyramids of products that grow like anthills all over the grocery store. Each presentation technique has two things in common. They all emphasize abundance, and they are all concerned with how to present abundance in a legible manner.

When I saw my show hung for the first time, I truly felt that all my criticism and conjecture were slightly off. I felt happy and shocked that I had made something that was bigger than me. I want to produce this feeling more and more. This will probably involve more time based accumulation projects. By this, I mean I will make work that is a collection or arrangement of other works. The collection will function as the art piece. I will start each collection with a vague idea of the structure that will contain and display them.

One of the projects I plan to do is to recreate a McDonalds with everything from cups to uniforms made by hand. I want it to be sloppy and crappily made. Everything
should look as if a child made it or as if a really stupid person were trying to trick the viewer into thinking this was a real McDonalds. The installation would cook and sell real burgers wrapped in handmade McDonalds boxes that are colored in crayon. Obviously the home made burgers will not look nearly as good as the plastic disks that the real McDonald’s serves. Some of the reasoning behind this similar to the reasoning behind the “Jars” project. No one ever really thinks of burgers at McDonalds as made items. They are more like naturally growing mushrooms or fungus to us. By making a homemade McDonalds, I hope to draw attention to parts of our climate that we block out.

I also plan to go full throttle with the gridded collages. I plan on assembling empty sheets of various colored paper into a grid first, and then doing the successive imagery on them to produce the collage. I will do this because grids seem to be vital to how grocery stores work. The grid is a way to make a critical mass of abundance legible (4.1, 4.2 ). Stores display things in order to make them visible and overwhelming. Grids provide a structure that can contain the embarrassment of riches that is consumer culture. Grids work a lot like “tragedy” or “Jars” as a way of distancing something. The grid also allows one to see the deviations that occur within it. A map is a gridded landscape, denoting where the landscape deviates from the perfect grid. Since grids are the underlying structure of grocery stores, to place “art work” in a similar structure would inevitably suggest several meanings. Obviously there’s art as commodity. But there is also the idea that the commodity one buys is the culture that one lives; that commodity is art.

The latest use of comparison in my work is to overlap different images like a movie montage to create both narratives and comparisons. I just started doing these recently, and I need some more time to think about how these work.

I don’t think I will make many more jars for a while.
APPENDIX

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Figures 3.7 and 3.8 Pornography
Figures 3.9 and 3.10 Hiro Shi You-You Ma and Diana

Figure 3.11 Donut Wedding
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Figures 3.14 Aboutness
Figure 4.1 Grid

Figure 4.2 Grid
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