The Discount Shopper, The Crafter, The Portrait Artist

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By

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My work looks at the five-year-old's teddy bear at age twenty-five, thus asking the question of how our memories and time change our perceptions. The forced relationship between images and ideas, asks one to reevaluate comfortable beliefs about one's environment. The pairing of seemingly unlike things becomes a valuable approach for analysis. At this moment in time the activity of making unlikely comparisons through my work is focused on the relationship between emotional and unemotional activities. The tension between times of emotional fulfillment and those of emotional stagnancy reveals itself through everyday activity. The nature of these activities, such as needlepointing or woodworking, and the tendency for one's increased or decreased involvement according to one's emotional state is of great interest to me. As individuals we feel the need to fill our time in a way that is accepted as meaningful. My work explores the relative value of an intimate relationship and that of a hand crafted latchook rug. As an artist it is necessary for me to make work that extends itself beyond purely decorative function. Ironically, I access meaning through analysis of such decorative crafts and mindless repeated activities. Thus, I believe that in order to grow as individuals it is
necessary not only to act, but to seek an understanding of the causes and consequences of one's actions.
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INTRODUCTION

My work looks at the five-year-old's teddy bear at age twenty five, thus asking the question of how our memories and time change our perceptions. Forced combinations of images and objects challenge me to evaluate comfortable beliefs and ideas about my environment. The pairing of seemingly unlike things becomes a valuable approach for analysis. At this moment in time, activity of making unlikely comparisons through my work is focused on the relationship between emotional and unemotional activities. By this, I refer to activities which stir up strong emotions within an individual: that event or series of events which causes us to feel love, hatred, jealousy, or other passionate emotions which alter ones outlook of their situation in some way; a particular event that causes an individuals perceptions of their surroundings to change; that event which is so removed from one's daily routine that it causes a reevaluation of that routine. The second part of this pairing of seemingly opposite things are those objects or ideas which represent activities used to pass time. These are the activities
which become the thoughtless, mindless rituals upon which the daily routine is based. These pairings allow me to look at and further understand how time affects our earliest understandings.
THE DISCOUNT SHOPPER, THE CRAFTER, THE PORTRAIT ARTIST

Growing up without many neighbors, I spent a good deal of time planning how I could embark upon an adventure. My favorite books were about boarding schools and faraway places. One book, "The Trolley Car Family", fascinated me as unemployment forced a family to turn an abandoned trolley car into their home. In "The Littles," a family of two-inch tall people drank from thimbles and drove cars made from match boxes.

In third grade, I wrote to Weekly Reader, a magazine for children, asking to join their staff as a writer. In fourth grade, the circus received my resume; I had no abilities but offered to make and sell sandwiches (while this may have been profitable at a Grateful Dead concert, Barnum and Bailey were not interested.) My interest in the jobs for which I was "applying" was never as great as the need for my experiences to be unique from the experiences of others. At this age, I was too young to be concerned about appearances, and I suspect that these ambitions were an attempt to fill a void. Loneliness? Boredom? Isolation?
Much of my early work that contains images of children represents my self-awareness at a young age. The sense of otherness (or the need for otherness) is reflected in the awareness of the children and by the manipulation of objects into "something else." Altering the stereotypical idea of what a child is supposed to be exposes the falseness of such ideas.

Each print in the series called "photocopies" (figure 1) fits an 8 1/2" by 11" or 11 1/2" by 14" format in order to mimic the size of a photocopy. This series consists of found snapshots of children interacting with one another. The snapshots were made into black and white photocopies and then manipulated by hand with correction fluid and pencils so that "normal" children appeared to have physical deformities. The altered images were then rephotographed and printed as photolithographs that look convincingly like the copies that any parent may be seen making at Kinko's around Christmas time.

These images serve several purposes. All the children in the photographs appear to be interacting normally. In one example, five children wearing bathing suits play by a pool. In another, two children, obviously siblings, are embracing. I suspected that the images would be difficult to observe, despite the fact that the children in the photos act in a natural, comfortable manner seemingly unaffected by their "disabilities". On this level, I was trying to investigate the ways in which a viewer's perceptions and personal experiences would affect their relationship with the images. Would a photocopy of a "crippled" child be somehow less acceptable than that of a child appearing to fit physical
Figure 1: "photocopies" (detail), lithograph, 8 1/2" x 11"
norms? How does time and memory change our perceptions?

Also, and more importantly "Photocopies" expresses my own childhood desire for otherness. To the five year old me, being deformed meant living one's every day existence with a dramatic edge. As a child, I was in awe of those who were different for any reason, especially those individuals who were physically or mentally challenged. Excited by my passion towards them, I consequently sought to make all situations more passionate, more emotional to elevate the homogeneous everyday experience. The purpose of physically manipulating an image is to heighten ones emotional response to it.

Manipulation is used throughout my work in order to create a more emotionally intense situation. Often aspects of ritual act singularly or in combination with other elements to manipulate a comfortable environment in order to create a feeling of "otherness". In later work, ritualistic aspects of domestic crafts are used to explore adult relationships but in earlier work, the ritual is represented by childhood games used to create make-believe identities. Most commonly photographs represent children adorned with sticks and stones symbolically placed on their bare chest. Such subjects seem to linger somewhere between the innocence of childhood and an acute awareness of the fragility of life. Because of the strange relationship created between the juxtaposition of ritual and commercial aspects of advertising and packaging, the final work becomes something of an enigma (what is not understood is likely to be considered "other").
"Party Hat with Elastic String" (figure 2) has all the elements required of a packaged birthday party hat: brightly colored patterns, a child model endorsing the product, and a hat with a lovable kitty on it. However, the elements of this birthday celebration suit the occasion in name only. The brightly colored stars and flowers are the background to a black and white image of a solemn faced boy. Furthermore, the boy is decorated with sticks and rocks and looks as though he is about to participate in a primitive ritual. The party hat has a cute kitty but the image has been reversed and printed in brown. The result is not the "cute" image a consumer would expect. Once again, it seems that the less than adorable boy will not succeed in selling the less than explainable object. Most children are more likely to be seen outside playing with sticks and rocks then sitting posed and smiling with "kitty" on their lap. Why then is the image of a pink frocked girl the one that is expected and often found on every box and label?

One certainly looks at things differently as a five-year-old than as a twenty-five-year old: simple at first, complex and challenging as time goes on. I am very conscious of the stereotypical idea of the female crafter. She sits in her easy chair wearing a knit sweatshirt in some probable shade of pastel with any number of cute cuddly stuffed animals adorning it, giving us what is probably the best example of the five-year-old's teddy bear at age twenty five. This woman has a typical hair color and wears it: closely cropped; long and pulled back into last years style; clipped back into a bow suggesting she still has some connection to her adolescence? She stares vacantly at the television. It
Figure 2: "PartyHat with Elastic String", lithograph, mixed media, 46 1/2" x 24"
is nine-o'clock on any night of the week and the budding romance on whatever prime
time show airs on Tuesday (Wednesday? Thursday?) may or may not make her feel
weep[y. This depends on how many rows she has finished on her latest cross stitch
 sampler. I say woman because it is the gender with which I most easily identify, but
perhaps it is a man in his basement mass producing lawn ducks or creating the ultimate
tool organizer. It could be any activity which is repetitive and requires little thought in
terms of technical execution but does, however, require an enormous time commitment.
Generally such activities are performed alone in front of the television. Such mass
undertakings of crafting are a way to fill a void, to pass the empty time between intense
emotional experiences. They are empty, they are repetitive, but the enormous
commitment of time seems to provide a sense of accomplishment, a meaningful way for
the hours to pass.

The activities discussed are not as pathetic as the exaggerated descriptions of
them. I suspect that it is natural for all individuals to want to fill what I refer to as "the
void" in a productive way. I have begun to analyze the process of "void filling" and how
it affects my approach to making art. I have noticed that many of my pieces exist in a
format that demands multiples. An example of this would be any of my packaged product
pieces that mimic store displays. The production of multiples is an obvious way to mimic
consumer packaging. I wondered however if my initial attraction was to the packaging
format or, more importantly, to the opportunity to make multiples (more time passes
during the production of fifteen than of four.)

There has always been something about an initial idea that has felt unfinished
unless its creation includes a repeated action. This repetition acts as an incubation period
from which the idea can not be released until a certain amount of work is completed. In
my very early landscape paintings, this meant the sanding and resanding of the surface
until the final image "emerged." Later, narrative pieces were rendered pristinely, layer
upon subtle layer of value until the imagery began to compete for attention with the
overall surface texture.

The product piece, "Red Crown" (figure 3), was intended to appear very low
quality "Odd Lots" all the way down to the last detail. While the product format allowed
for the comparison of separate images and objects in a piece, the low quality format
would allow for viewer accessibility to the piece (an attempt to provide a less formal
viewing environment.) More importantly, the "bargain quality" of the packaging
suggested the same about the contained product. This gave the piece a cynical bite when
one considered that the contained product, in this case a paper crown, usually had
nostalgic value. Attempts at low quality appearance included such techniques as the
deliberate misregistration of patterns. Although my intention was to create something that
appeared to be "cheap and rushed", the products were meticulously printed in editions of
Figure 3: "Red Crown", lithograph and mixed media, 46 1/2" x 24"
fifteen or more. I soon recognized that the action of repeating a particular task during the process was as important as the presence of multiple objects in the completed piece. At this point, I began a conscious investigation of the relationship between emotional experience and static, repeated activity.

The three dimensional piece entitled "Skid" (figure 4), which bears the image of a reclining child with clenched fists becomes a container for large bundles of bamboo sticks bound into groups of ten. There are approximately twenty of these packages which are piled onto a varnished, rectangular packing skid. The packages are placed onto the skid in three stacks. The first is the image of a reclining child's head and upper torso. The paper insert wraps from the front halfway around the back of the package. The second and third stacks are inverted so the viewer has access to the image of an elfin cupid figure printed on the back half of the insert. The elfin figures have been printed and placed in the plastic packages in such a way that the figures in the lower two stacks approach each other from opposite directions. This creates the illusion of a quilt like grid of sticks and arrow bearing elves. The length of the skid in relation to the child is life size and the tense posture of the child encourages a narrative about a sleeping child having a nightmare. The nightmare is the intense emotional experience, while the bound sticks which appear to serve no purpose (or if so, a very obscure one) act as the product of static activity (the result of countless hours of time spent is eventually nothing.) It is obvious by the irregular cutting
Figure 4: "Skid", lithograph and mixed media, 4'x2'x3'
and taping of the sticks that the action was the product of human labor and not
performed by machine; thus, hand-made mass production. The cheap but convincing
packaging and the immense number of the product itself insinuates that it is intended for
sale, that it is created to be wanted or used by someone, but its purpose is an enigma. One
must consider that the packages in this instance are not sitting on a store display but are
indeed on a packing skid. Are these leftover unsold items in the warehouse?

I felt that the reclining position of the child in "Skid" could cause the bed
structure to be interpreted as coffin. Such an interpretation would distract the viewer
from the comparison of emotion/ repeated action, though the additional issues
surrounding childhood death. Although this layer may add to the complexity of the many
unresolvable questions asked by the piece, I sought a simpler representation in my next
piece.

After completing this piece, I began to investigate the possibility of representing
"static action" without the distraction of so many visual elements. The project I began in
order to represent this idea was an eight-foot by eight-foot latchhook rug. I chose to
complete the rug entirely in yellow yarn (a bright canary yellow that would probably fail
to enhance the beauty of any room.) The enormous size of the rug and the fact that it was
absent of "Tweety Bird" or any other popular rug icon further emphasized the
uselessness of the activity. Without the satisfaction of at least seeing "Tweety's" face
from the labor of one's nimble fingers, the question becomes the difference between
creating or buying an all yellow carpet square? Halfway through the project, I had several concerns. First, would the viewer be able to distinguish my latchhook from a manufactured carpet of the same (ugly) color? If not, the intent of the piece would be lost entirely. Secondly, even if the viewer could perceive the obsessive nature of the carpet, the absence of imagery gave no insight into the cause of such an obsession. Perhaps such a simple, soft spoken, subtle, piece needed to be placed in context with other works in a gallery space.

Considering context I became interested to see how the images from my package pieces could be compared if they were taken out of the packaging format. I began to experiment with framed two dimensional pieces with related objects placed near them. One aspect of the packaging format that I found extremely important was its "authentic nature." The colors, patterns, and materials of these pieces mimicked a form that was comfortable and familiar. I wanted the viewer to feel as though they were inside of the "everyday routine" (such as shopping) when their perceptions were challenged by the unusual or disturbing aspects added to a "normal" object. While stepping away from the package format allowed the separation between comparisons to become so physically great that the viewer could actually move between them, I was aware of the sense of formality that an "installation" could impose. With this in mind, I placed objects within the environment that one might "normally" encounter (I refer to the object before it has been manipulated or abstracted into an art object.) Less consideration was given to the
image hanging on the wall because even in the most conservative midwestern home, one makes allowances for what is found within a frame ("Oh that's modern Art").

An example of the resulting installation would be the piece entitled "Pink Bean Bag" (figure 5.) On the wall is the stark, black and white image of the reclining child with tensed fists. The bottom of the composition is a large yellow rectangle of flat color. On the floor, approximately three feet in front of the frame, is a large bean bag. The front of the bag is dirty brown and bears a "hot" pink line drawing of the arrow-bearing cupid. A "hot" pink rectangle of color forms the back of the bean bag. Although separated by space the objects are linked in several ways. First, The bottom of the print is absent of any specific imagery. It is natural for the viewer to want to fill that space with what is placed in front of it. Secondly, when one stands between the objects, there is an immediate connection between the large colored rectangles.

"Pink Bean Bag" represents a break from my production of multiples. The presence of emotion is represented by the relationship between the boy, the cupid figure, and the tension of the physical space between them. Both the physical space and the empty rectangles of color become a void (perhaps a symbol of emotional void.) While the yellow rug depended on other pieces to give it the context of emotional desire, "pink bean bag" also depends on other work to provide it with a sense of obsessive action. Because
Figure 5: "Pink Bean Bag", lithograph and screenprint, approximately 4' x 4' x 6'
of my intent to place this piece near others which focused on “static action”, I felt it was not necessary to emphasize repeated activity in this piece. In the series begun next, action and emotion occupy separate sides of a composition, but they show a more direct physical relationship between these elements than in the bean bag piece. I was still experimenting with the effectiveness of physically separated comparisons without the use of the package format. A change in subject matter also occurred. Previously, I had been using images of children. Childhood is viewed as the time when one most purely experiences emotions. In the early stages of our lives, emotions are a knee-jerk response to a particular action or situation. As we develop those emotional reactions, they often become twisted and abstracted by our own emotional analysis. Using an image of a child asks the viewer to reevaluate a childhood response to an experience.

Considering again the idea of the "lonely crafter" and the nature of the emotional fulfillment she desires, I felt that a leap to adult imagery was necessary. However, the idea of the childlike products was still intriguing as I thought about the ways that toys and childlike images could represent certain aspects of the emotional experiences of an adult. Combining both types of images would suggest the nature of adult experiences as well as illustrate how our memories of childhood change our perceptions of the present.

The series of prints which I refer to as the "Kitchen Table Drawings" (figure 6) are separated into two parts, much like the format of my packaging pieces. This allows a
Figure 6: "Kitchen Table Drawing", lithograph and ballpoint pen, 10" x 12"
direct comparison between two components while they remain separate and do not slip comfortably into each other’s space. It is important that the relationship between two unlike elements feels forced. Combined elements would indicate coexistence instead of comparison. It is my intent that one be able to reflect upon the compatibility of the images or objects to be compared.

The bottom of each print has the image of a stomach being touched by a pair of hands. In some of the images the subtle curve of the breast is visible; in others the body seems to be covering itself from view. It is not clear whether the figures are in the posture of adult sexuality or the posture of child-like self-investigation (a kind of "I just found my belly button game"). The ambiguity of this posture suggests "emotional waiting" (or perhaps "emotional wanting"), but at the same time, it indicates a resistance to the transition from childhood to adulthood.

The top half of the prints is where the term "kitchen table drawing" comes from. It refers to the doodle one makes while engaged in phone conversation. The upper half of each print is filled with "doodles". Each print has only one specific type of mark in order to amplify the idea of obsessive action. One example would be the blue ball point pen and pink highlighter drawings of the familiar "house puzzle": a brain teaser in which a house with an "x" in the middle must be formed without retracing over any line. The house puzzle doodle is particularly important because while it functions as a mindless repetitious task, the image also has symbolic content which refers to security and
domestic spaces. In essence the repeated task becomes a kind of mantra for the desired emotion. The drawings completely fill the top of the print but do not infringe upon the image of the belly. The prints are almost the correct size for a greeting card that has been used as a scratch pad. They were left intentionally unfolded however, so they would not mimic greeting cards but only make reference to them.

Manipulated objects are used in many of my pieces to give them "bite". I often analyze the normal perception of a particular situation to create a visual cliché. Particular objects or images are then altered from their context, slightly tweaking the cliched structure and inviting the viewer to question stereotypes or conventions.

"Monkey Belly" (figure 7) combines an image of a bride and groom with the image of a cartoon monkey to comment on adult relationships. The package itself consists of a stomach gripped by its own hands in a posture which rests ambiguously between seduction and self-investigation. The round edge of the breasts is evident just below the top of the package. This image is squeezed between a canary yellow border on two sides. The entire top of the package is folded over against a pink and blue background, which repeats the silhouettes of a bride and groom dancing under wedding bells. The product contained in the elongated package is a pillow which has a monkey screen printed onto tan fabric with red sequined backing. The pillow is attached to a wooden rod by a yellow cord suggesting a fishing rod. The dancing couple reveals the characters, the belly
Figure 7: "Monkey Belly", lithograph and screenprint on mixed media, 46 1/2" x 24"
the theme is sexuality, and the dangling pillow bearing the image of the monkey
insinuates teasing. Does the monkey act as the lure? Do the bright colors similar to those
on toy packages indicate play? If so, this is in direct contrast to the dancing bride and
groom and the ideas of responsibility that correspond to this commitment.

"Monkey Belly" uses the forced relationship between the monkey and the belly
to blur the line between childhood and adulthood. It dispels the idea of the flawless
mature relationship, much the way "Party Hat" shows us that children are not dolls. One
major difference between "Monkey Belly" and earlier pieces is that the use of color and
pattern are intended to give important information to the narrative beyond a general
mimicking of a format. The bride and groom pattern becomes a player in the piece, the
characters who use the metaphorical "monkey pillow" in childish games of jealousy. The
yellow borders flanking the black image of the stomach form a "caution flag". The monkey
pillow itself is much more abstracted from a conventional store product than the kitty
party hat. This is because the monkey product plays a more original and active role
within its environment.

Up to this point a repetitious activity has taken a three dimensional form such as
a latchook rug, a doll, or a sewn beanbag. I am also interested in the idea of the portrait as
an object. There is no better example of a mindless repetitious activity than a portrait
drawn from a photograph. Such portraits seem to gain preciousness as the level of labor
increases, although they are being continually abstracted from the original. In essence, the
more removed something becomes, the more precious it is. The countless layers of subtle rendering only add to the value of something that does not have the capacity for emotional interaction.

Next to a precisely drawn image of a little girl in a ruffled dress are the large reproduced instructions from an origami book, "how to make a drinking cup that really works" (figure 8). These two images are very different from one another. It is my intent that the viewer recognize both the cup and the portrait as objects.

Another portrait rendered in pencil shows a ballet class of eight year olds. The portrait is flanked on either side by eleven rubber chickens on a flat orange background. Twenty two ballerinas and Twenty two rubber chickens: is the abstraction of a drawn photo of the same value as a pile of rubber chickens? Is there a connection between the over aggressive attempt at realism and the rubber flesh of the toy chicken?

In a third portrait, the relationship between the girl and the rubber chicken is more literal. His goose pimpled face is carelessly drawn in thick black paint next to her head and right on top of the subtle graphite modeling. Does an act of spontaneity ruin the hours of obsession?

The lonely crafter still sits in her easy chair but grows discontent with the program on the television. Lars has left Carla for Karen. The budding romance is in shambles as a web of jealousy and deceit is woven. The crafter turns her attention away from the television and begins to stitch even more intensely than before. She raises her
Figure 8: "Origami", lithograph and pencil drawing, 28" x 36"
eyes only for the commercials. The disappointment on the program widens her void so she ignores it. What happens when the emotional experience is pushed away, removed?

Recently, I have struggled with the issue of people relocating, “leaving me”, causing changes in many of my personal relationships. It is difficult to focus in the face of emotional struggle. To give up productive activity, however, would only provide more empty time to focus on painful or confusing issues. I have noticed that at such times, I usually begin a piece that requires a lot of "busy work". An activity such as binding sticks together allows me to accomplish something without much emotional equipment.

As I thought more about this, it seemed that through "busy work," I was trying to remove myself from the situation. I wondered what would happen if instead of physically completing the work, I was able to visually represent it. Common to my work was also the representation of the emotional source. I assumed that if the source could be represented in a way that was as cold and removed as the time-passing task, both images would work together to visually represent the process of "emotional removal."

The resulting images are a series of lithographic diptychs entitled "Boy Leaving" (figure 9). On the left side of each diptych is a cartoonish image against an irritating yellow background. One cartoon depicts a boy with a plastic expression carrying briefcases. Another shows the boy naked; however, the area where his torso would be is left blank. Both images represent physical absence. The use of a cartoon was intended to add another layer of distance. The cartoon style does not seem to accurately represent
Figure 9: "Boy Leaving" (detail), lithograph, 40" x 60"
emotions expected to accompany the loss of a loved one. It is also important that the figure is depicted as being ambiguously between childhood and adulthood. Does this suggest that emotional removal is a process learned in childhood? The boy with the missing torso definitely suggests the absence of a physical relationship as well. What does this suggest about the connection between physical intimacy and emotional removal? The right side of each diptych shows instructions for the completion of a plastic canvas, needlepoint craft of one form or another. It is not important what the object is, but that it represents a static task. The illustrations of the patterns do this effectively on a visual level as they become a mindless grid of crosses and hashes.

It seems that the distance from an emotional activity, a relationship for example, creates a safety zone. By avoiding emotional relationships, an individual is freed from encountering the negative consequences of them. While this may be, it is unlikely that an individual can deny the need for intimacy (physical and emotional.) The series of prints entitled "Horsebelly House" (figure 10) represents an attempt to substitute obsessive activities for intimacy. The piece itself is very large and consists of four, forty by sixty inch diptychs. They are very similar in color and composition to the "Boy leaving" series discussed in the last section. The left side of each of the four diptychs consists of a flat yellow background upon which is printed the cartoon image of a horse with a dipped back balanced precariously on two stools. The image remains unchanged in each of the four panels with the exception of the "house puzzle", a geometric form resembling a house,
Figure 10: "Horsebelly House" (detail), lithograph and impressed graphite, 40" x 60"
Which changes position slightly in each frame. The intention of this is to represent a potentially active situation as stagnant and unchanging. This is reinforced by the fact that for the horse, any movement could bring potentially negative consequences. Although it is evident that the horse would be injured in a fall, information about the severity of the situation is limited by the simplicity of the choices and the composition. The movement of the house puzzle becomes even more important within these limits. As the only active player, it becomes the focus of the composition. The viewer is baited to question what its presence means, but finds information which would resolve the question to also be limited.

Impressed Graphite is used to compose the right side of each diptych. This is significant because it is the first time in this body of work that the medium gives evidence of human touch. In previous pieces print is used to create distance, further supported by the ominous color choices and the manufactured quality of the "drawings." The sudden presence of graphite therefore is intended to raise the viewers expectations of a physical relationship between the artist and the piece: "Perhaps there will be a voluptuous surface; perhaps this body of work will finally be pleasing to the eye."

Although the medium sets the stage for what one might suspect to be an emotionally charged drawing (at least in comparison with former pieces), it turns out to be just another expression of useless repetition. The four gray graphite panels consist
only of a single impressed line repeated until the page is full. Despite the shine of the
graphite impressions, the composition is really quite dull.

In "HorseBelly House", previously assumed roles have been switched; emotion is
represented through repetition; repeated tasks are done in a freer more emotional medium.
And yet despite an active attempt at change, the artist (and consequently the viewer) is
captured in the same trap, a pattern of recognition and repetition without resolve. Creativity
is limited to the rearrangement of predetermined parts of a process and what they may
mean because of it.
CONCLUSION

This body of work is very much autobiographical. It recognizes my situation and then creates a persona to effectively represent and respond to the situation (my own game of multiple personalities.) In order to effectively motivate myself toward artistic and personal change, I have created "the odd lots shopper", "the crafter", and "the portrait artist." These characters are compartmentalized portions of self, small specimens for analysis, parts of my personality which I wish to control and change. The work that comes from these personas is more likely to cause irritation than visual pleasure according to traditional standards of formal beauty. It is more effective in my process of self analysis to create work that will spark change, than to create work that will cause "food coma" (the kind of expected and previously encountered satiation that causes one to fall asleep in their easy chair.)

Irritated by the crafter, I create the crafts much larger than they were ever intended to be seen in order to amplify my irritation. "Horsebelly House", for example,
represents amplified insecurities concerning artistic elements that are considered "cute."
The horse, the quintessential cartoon, is recognized by its cliché nature. How then can it be considered outside of the cartoon context? The horse is juxtaposed with graphite impressions of equal size, but the horse still seems to overpower it. The cute cartoonish nature of the horse dominates anything placed next to it. "Cute" means one's work is not to be taken seriously. It means that one's work does not extend itself beyond the surface. "Cute" is cliché, childlike, stereotyped, and controlled. Despite this, I continually and deliberately use these elements in my work. By embracing such stereotypes and challenging myself to find relationships in which the definition is extended or counteracted, my work exposes the cyclical nature of fear: the fear of becoming "the crafter", fear of substituting mindless obsessions for relationships, fear of falling short of my own expectations.

The five year old's teddy bear at age twenty-five bears little resemblance to the day it was first received. A complete understanding of the significance of the animal involves an intense analysis of one's memories and a comparison to one's present experiences (neurotic awareness of the significance of everything.) Comparisons lead to the formation of critical questions. The approach to such an analysis must be as honest and intense as a child's interaction with a toy.

Beauty, found singularly in a lushly manipulated surface is a blanket. By stripping my work of everything but basic elements acting to form a question or
comparison, I seek answers with immediacy and directness. My choice of colors, the size of the pieces themselves, the style of drawing, everything has been deliberately selected to maintain focus on the content. Absent are the flowery words, sweet colors, soft music... anything that may lull one into the hypnotic state which invites blind acceptance of one's surroundings.

With this body of work, I have not stopped to consider its visual success in terms of its visual appeal. I use each piece to reach the next one; manipulating a surface for comfort or enjoyment would seem to only delay the progress of my search, and so I feel that my works, through their direct and immediate process, lose their chance at being considered "beautiful" (as a landscape built up in many layers of translucent color.) I realize that this is a somewhat unfair, if not untrue, statement. Perhaps my work in it's simplicity of surface or complexity of thought has its own kind of beauty. Still, I feel that is important to refer to it in these terms because it is these terms that define my process of working. In my head, I constantly force myself to decide what is important (to pare down.) The work I used to make was more about surface than it was about idea. I scratched, sanded, erased, and accumulated time, and while there were ideas behind what I was making, those ideas seemed to fall in line behind work ethic and surface manipulation. My goal in the past several years has been to let my ideas speak first. I have struggled to make decisions that best expressed and supported the intent of my piece. While a lush
surface may just as effectively express an idea as a sparse one, for me the decision was to avoid the temptation of mindless markmaking in order to "get at the idea."

I feel that this body of work has helped me to gain a greater awareness of the function of each element within a particular piece. My decision to pristinely render a portrait is made with an understanding of what that kind of markmaking will communicate to the viewer. My work demands that I retain the flexibility to explore an idea from a variety of perspectives in order to best understand the significance of the experiences I am analyzing. It is my intent in the future to experiment further with how the complexity or simplicity of a surface, or object, most effectively supports my idea.