MAYBE NOT TODAY, MAYBE NOT TOMORROW, BUT SOON, AND FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE:

AN ANALYSIS OF WORK ETHIC, SEDUCTION AND BI-MEDIUM PRACTICE.

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

The following paper operates as an extended artist statement. It is a detailed examination of the major concerns that inform and prioritize my questioning.

In this context, the text examines six particular two- and three-dimensional pieces I made during the period September 1996, through June 1998 at The Ohio State University. The importance of the topics discussed here however extends across and influence my entire body of work during these two years.

This text also acts as the primary defense for my MFA degree exhibition presented at The Ohio State University Hoyt L. Sherman Studio Clean Space, Saturday, May 30th through Wednesday June 3rd, 1998.
For my Mother and Father

and their encouragement to work, to escape.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am an artist who produces both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. These formats fulfill particular and distinctive roles.

Ultimately, my work begins and ends with drawing. Whether, on a certain day, I choose to draw in chalk or in space, it is always my desire for a PICTURE.

The picture is an image I generate mentally; it inspires the making of a piece. Whatever form this eventually takes, the genesis occurs, in a sense, with the familiar phrase, "Picture this...."

I demand to view things, visit places, and handle objects to bring them into the realm of my experience: my subjective understanding of the world. For this reason, I find it necessary to construct pictures to understand them.

To clearly comprehend the cohesive link between my work and my drawings, it is beneficial that I clarify my classification of the term. I consider the word "drawing" to encompass a distinct set of constituents, outreaching the traditional sense of the term, as simply a form of mark-making. My designation encompasses notation, collection, categorization and simplification; ultimately it is an attempt to comprehend my surroundings. I find drawing to be the most direct method of perception and a fundamental aid to understanding: the primary link between thinking and doing. It is, therefore, the first form that my pictures take.
As an artist from Britain who has spent the last two years living and working in America, I have used my work to explore the differences that exist between the two nations. Although we may both speak English as a language, it is the subtle differences in language syntax, daily routines, rituals, schooling, social behavior, consumerism, and capitalism that are interesting, and I have used them as a major source of inspiration for my work. As a way of adjusting to my new surroundings, I have found myself involved in a plethora of notation, collection, categorization, and therefore, drawing. In addition, I have collected the colloquial phrasing I have heard around me, verbal and written, from the street and the television. I have therefore also amassed a collection of text and have used this to inform the titles of my work, and directly as text within the work. Many of my works are a critique of the country in which I have worked for two years. In particular, my critique has examined American commercial television as the box that sits in our living rooms with the pure function of selling products, and has commented upon the illusory Hollywood image of American lifestyle as a microcosm of socio-economic observation. These observations have entered my work and humor has also found its way into my critique of these cultures. I examine ironies and point out the differences in perspective between the two nations.

Conflicts existing between my upbringing in Britain's class-structured society and my experience of working in America's wealth-structured society have also become important sources of inspiration. Being here has made me aware of the fundamental difference that America operates as a pure capitalist economy compared to the structure of a balanced socialist-capitalist economy in Britain. Issues of labor and the work-ethic have become important subject-matter and content in my work.
CHAPTER 2

DRAWING, SEEING THE PICTURE, AND THE VALUE OF WORK

In whichever way I choose to understand my practice, I know that the work I make is a response to documentation and to my fastidious need to collect and accumulate.

In America I have been the veritable “kid in a candy store.” On a daily basis, I have been exposed to an overwhelming range of images and products, sights and sounds. In every sense of the word, these have been new experiences. My eyes have been opened wide by the sheer magnitude of new information that needs to be processed twenty-four hours a day. Mine has been the experience of working in a new environment and a culture which operates at a faster pace. On a return to England during the summer of 1997, my eyes remained responsive, and I found myself re-sifting the information of my home. I began to dig up the oddities, contradictions and ironies of a culture I had always taken for granted. In both countries, it has been such phenomena that have become prime source material for my work.

Ethical, moral, and daily routines and rituals of the two cultures have become prominent subjects for my work. Comparisons have included those between the American coffee on-the-go, and the British, everything stops for a cup-of-tea break. For example, compare the oddity that in England, the kettle is immediately boiled for tea in times of crisis, and the fact that in America you can order a hamburger, make a phone call, or visit a
bank without ever having to leave your car. I have observed that the buttons on drive-through ATM’s have Braille print. I hear “What’s Up?” answered by the response, “Nothing”. Raising your hand to beckon a waitress is considered rude in an American restaurant; in England, it is the acceptable way to quicken the lousy service. The list is endless, and I could probably write a paper simply in the form of a list like this.

Materials, places and events that catch my eye have become content: icons, monuments, music, supermarkets, overheard conversations in the street and television. Materials that I have used in my work have included sodas, post-it notes, push-pins, magazine collage and postage-stamps¹. The prosaic elements that surround my daily life have become malleable matter. As sculpture materials, I have used elements that I find to be different to my eyes, yet apparently mundane and available in abundance. For example, I have used printed letter paper in Paper, Nails, Air, Faith², or classroom chairs in Nine Reasons to Sit Down, Nine Reasons to Remain Standing.³

I filter all this information directly through drawing and word-play. The data has come in thick and fast and at times I have felt the need to record it all: I pick out, fish, dredge, collect as though opening up a gigantic sluice gate of daily life, an overbearing pile of western garbage. On reflection, I have realized that I have distilled the information I’ve ingested: I have had to re-assess how I wake up in the morning, feed myself, arrange my finances, and tackle bureaucracy. The largest part of what I have seen, including some of the above elements, has excited me, and entered my studio. In this process, my sketchbook has become a ubiquitous and essential ally. Here the earliest formation of pictures takes place. I commonly place found text alongside found imagery, found imagery beside more imagery. This becomes a starting point for the juxtaposition elements of my work. It is a place to play, to be amused. It is a place to begin.

¹ See Figure no. 1. Page 23.
² See Figure no. 2. Page 24.
³ See Figure no. 3. Page 25.
Drawing is my primary documentary tool. It aids my desire to see the picture - my need to understand experiences by breaking them down, and re-atomizing them. Whether the work eventually exists two- or three-dimensionally, my vision of a piece always begins as this mental picture, and it needs to be produced. In fact, my drive to make a piece of work comes simply from the selfishness of wanting to see that picture made physical. This has occurred not just on the page, but in space as sculpture, and through environment as installation, always a re-creation under my own terms.

Labor plays an important role in the execution, subject matter, and content of my pieces. We all have some sense of our relationship to work. One of the imposing differences I noted when I came to live in America was the strenuous expectation placed on hard-work and a motivation to succeed; prominently, the wide-spread belief that success is achievable by all. This position, in some cases conflicted with, in others expanded my attitude to work. In particular, it has led to a re-examination of the upbringing I had in a working-class environment. My father always emphasized my family’s position within the class structure of British society and adamantly instilled his Pseudo-Protestant-Proletarian beliefs. As a result, first-and-foremost I have felt the need to prove the value of my contribution, as a worker. I have made productivity, craftsmanship and a sense of working to meet the parameters of self-imposed projects the mainstay of my studio practice. These have become fundamental working routines. My decision to make a series of conceptually and formally linked paintings and drawings called, ****vision is a good example. Cooperatively, my Marxist beliefs have manifested as form, content, and subject matter in everything that I make. This has allowed my work to operate as a socio-economic critic of the US. Paying the Cost to the Boss⁴ for example reflects my observation of the excessiveness of American daily working-routines.

⁴ See Figure no. 4. Page 26.
I examine the blue-collar, factory production-line aspects of daily working-routines and use repetition as a formal structure to materialize these observations. Visual repetition of material and physical repetitive acts of making hold principal roles in my work and are evident in virtually everything I do. The repetitive act of driving four hundred nails into a wall in Paper, Nails, Air, Faith is an exploration of the act of physical labor. My examination of my Kafka-eseque relationship with an office environment in W.E. 133: Office (Oh Hawaii!)

In addition to my configuration of conceptual form, content and subject matter, I have always firmly believed that by choosing to use commonplace materials as both subject matter and physical content, I continue a relationship with my upbringing. I use everyday products which have included stationary supplies, hardware supplies and children’s toys. I adopt low art references, including popcorn movie sources, album cover art and comic book structuring and I subvert Pop Art images, the only art that fascinated me as a child: Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Claes Oldenburg in particular. I feel these approaches bear a close relationship with my early experiences of art, and the attitudes towards art of the people with whom I grew up. This vocabulary feels closer to my personal history than any desire to create austere or spiritual forms of work. Unfortunately, this assumption cannot avoid the argument that by the very fact I make art, I have already caught myself in the trap of what many people from my background see as an elitist environment.

My related experience as an education officer analyzing contemporary work with the general public in an inner-city museum was fundamental to my understanding of the role that art plays. I worked for the contemporary traveling exhibition, “British Art Show 4” at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff in the Summer of 1996. In this position I

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5 See Figure no. 5. Page 27.
began to fully appreciate the fact that all art operates on some level with all people. The experience encouraged me to realize that what I do does matter, does communicate, and does hold value.
CHAPTER 3

****VISION, MAY 1998.

The three pieces examined in this chapter are part of a collection of images inspired by television called ****vision and were exhibited as part of my MFA exhibition. Although the paintings were designed to be part of this whole, each piece involves specific formal, and theoretical concerns. Material continuities exist between the paintings: all measure five feet by five feet, and all were constructed using mixed-media on canvas.

Issues of craftsmanship and visual coherency are important in all three of the paintings. No matter how cluttered the images are or however quickly executed, my approach to design, especially the obsessively clean edge of the stretchers, represents my desire to symbolize the shallowness of the images, while satisfying my need for a clarity of craftsmanship.
3.1. *Truth, Justice, Start the American Day*.

In a sense, this painting is a still-life of two products: a bear-shaped honey container, and a milk carton. The two images are painted over a grid of US State maps. My decision to use the grid satisfies my requirement to formally represent work-ethic concerns. Spaces exist where the labels of the two products would normally be placed, and through these windows, the viewer gains access to the underlying collage. The words, *Milk*, and *Honey*, are stenciled above their opposite images.

The painting acts as an ironic representation of American values toward success. The title is a word play on the phrase, "Truth, Justice, and the American Way": a defense of the American quality of life. Historically, the United States has been seen as a "Land of Milk and Honey" to immigrants throughout the world and furthermore, the media continues to promote the country as such. This painting is a physical reflection of my feelings toward the difference between how America is and how it wants to be seen. My experience of American life has resulted in mixed feelings toward the "Milk and Honey" image of the country. America certainly offers a higher standard of living to people from countries far more politically, or economically unstable than Great Britain. Nevertheless, what I want to ask in this painting is the open question, "Does a higher standard of living also mean a higher quality of life?"

The forward gaze of the honey-bear confronts the viewers and demands that they ask the question relative to their relationship with the country. The image is a product specific to the United States and is an example of my use of the new-found materials that surround me. My placement of the words, *Milk* and *Honey* above their opposed images is an homage to the surrealist approach of an understanding of phrasing. In making it, I thought of Rene Magritte’s notorious anti-statement, "This is not a pipe."

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6 See Figure no. 6. Page 28.
3.2. *The Impossibility of Living in the Mind of Someone who is already Famous*.

The title of this painting is a corruption of British artist, Damien Hirst’s infamous shark-in-formaldehyde sculpture, *The Impossibility of Living in the Mind of Someone who is Already Dead*. It is a humorous, but direct, reference to the peculiarities of the avant-garde British art scene: notably, those artists currently labeled, *The Brit-Pack*. The painting is a commentary on the current emphasis placed on the will-to-succeed among British Art School graduates. There is an inescapable feeling of the “fast-track” or “no-track” in the country, an atmosphere I inescapably felt part of upon graduating in 1995.

A large silver sheriff’s badge sits centrally, dominating this painting. The star-shaped badge floats over a repeated collage of a photograph of Damien Hirst, drunk on success, in the arms of Super-model, Kate Moss. The photograph presents a shallow image of the achievable success of a young British Artist. In the lower-right-hand corner of the piece, the text “London Art scene. 1996 - 1997”, references this state-of-affairs. Charles Saatchi, the prominent collector who has financed, and thus directed the fame of these young artists, is represented as the indubitable “sheriff” of contemporary British Art. The star-shaped badge also double-plays as an image of the artist as “Star,” promoting the desirable nature of this status to art school graduates. It advocates the foregoing of integrity and encourages the production of slick, sexy, sassy work: to make work as image, rather than work as idea. Image as fashion.

My painting falls into exactly this description of art, and is designed to enter the fast read of the whole, set up by the **vision** series. That we are never given the time period necessary to ponder a circumstance is a phenomena of television. Instead, we must quickly move to the next presentation without due time to consider the seriousness of much of its subject matter.

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* See Figure no. 7. Page 29.
3.3.  *Prozac: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love The Bomb*\(^8\).

The title of this painting is an adaptation of the full title to the Stanley Kubrick film, “*Dr. Strangelove*”, itself an ironic analysis of the nature of the bomb. Formally, the painting is greatly influenced by my recent exposure to computer collage. Layers of information float over each other in the same manner that graphics software processes images.

In the sky-blue background, three paper airplanes fly past the viewer, a rudimentary symbol of flight. Over these, a lattice-work of prozac pills levitate past and then tumble bomb-like off the bottom of the canvas. Made from a sketch of a “Fat Boy” model at the Smithsonian, two line-drawings of bombs plummet to the ground. Finally, a row of cloud-covered Post-it notes attached to the canvas, remind the viewer of “Things To Do Today”. The symptoms, “Stuffy, Sneezy, Itchy, Runny” are stenciled below these.

The Post-it notes serve as a reminder of our overbearing schedules. The prozac and cold-symptom references suggest that in the Western World a pharmaceutical wonder-drug is available for every occasion, to help us through our day.

It is my hope that the painting warns us of the danger of becoming too self-obsessed, of becoming too concerned with one’s own working day. No matter how strenuous life may seem under the burden of Western economy, there are people in the world who starve. We have a responsibility to humanity that extends beyond our work-a-day concerns. We have an obligation to ensure that our attitude toward the bomb does not become passé. The weapon still exists as a very real, and very dangerous, concern.

\(^8\) See Figure no. 8. Page 30.
CHAPTER 4

SENSATION AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE

A reading of a collection of my work operates at a variety of speeds. Similarly, my output of these images, or in other words, my desire to see pictures, directs a construction time period dependent on the work in hand. At times I visualize a piece of work as surface. On other occasions, I demand a relationship with space. In either scenario, my primary aesthetic emphasis is always on the visual element of art. First and foremost, I want my work to operate as a visual seduction before it extends the viewer entrance into the more conceptual demands I place. Specifically this has been through my use of glossy, primary colors.

One attribute unifying my practice is a sense of irony: my use of an American icon, the sheriff’s badge, to represent the British art world for example. This is a characteristic that results from my particular sense of my surroundings. As I have stated, my interest is drawn toward the oddities, insecurities, and misdemeanors of daily life. The work I make, whether in the form of painting, on paper, computer collage, sculpture, or installation therefore has a particular tone.

By studying at The Ohio State University, I have placed myself in a different culture to my own. Compared to Great Britain, America has subtly different approaches to entrenched human relations. I have therefore needed to realize that I cannot take anything that I experience for granted. Virtually everything in the United States has been a new
experience that has altered my understanding of the world in some way. Naturally, this new sense of comprehension has become a valuable assistant, expanding my approach to my work.

American commercial television has recently become a primary source for my documentation. My feeling is that many of our insecurities come from the medium’s contribution to our mixed understanding of the world around us. The media, both through programming and advertising, presents images of the world which offer lifestyles beyond any truthful sense of perfection. More than by any other medium, America is most flamboyantly and sweepingly represented throughout the world by television. Unfortunately, because of the size of American television’s potential audience, the television stations appear to appeal to a lowest common-denominator model viewer, radically under-estimating the intelligence of it’s actual media-saturated audience. Fantasized images of a Hollywood-lifestyle are so prevalent that even though I considered myself mindful to this form of gloss, I still fell partially foul to this misrepresentation of the country when I first arrived. My only understanding of America before my arrival was through the medium of television. One of the important experiences of living here has been my better understanding of the fact that how America is, and how America wants to be seen are two different arguments. My physical interaction with the country has proven very different from the medium’s representation of my supposed relationship.

The flat television image’s closest counterpart in my work is the surface of a painting, or drawing: the collaborative work between Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol has been particularly influential here. Through my work, I attempt to replicate much of television’s temperament. In all of the two-dimensional work I produce, including the paintings discussed in this paper, one formal attribute immediately apparent is my use of the square. I consider this shape to bear the closest relationship to the nature of television. The format of a television picture is, of course, not square, but rectangular.
Nevertheless, the square seems to best represent the flavor of television, rather than its physical specifics. I think of television as having a box form. By working in either a traditional landscape or portrait rectangular format, I would stray from this sense. I think of the square as a window through which images may pass. Forms do not have to have a compositional relationship with the boundaries of the image, they just simply have to exist within it, only for a moment. In this manner, the pills tumble bomb-like off the bottom of the canvas in *Prozac: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love The Bomb*. Audience response to the work is a very quick read.

In America, television has to be consumed quickly. It has so much to promote and seemingly so little time to show it. I want my paintings and drawings to operate in the same manner. Somehow they need to fight their nature as static images. I therefore throw a strong sense of the bombastic and overbearing into the work, and this leads to a large amount of room for intuition in their construction. Consequently, their conception, and the execution of their images, operate more immediately than the three-dimensional work I make. It is for this reason that I produce the work in suites and series.

This manner of working reflects my need for production. My painting and drawing series, ****vision in particular, exemplifies this status. Working in two- and three-dimensions results from a set of issues more complex than a simple need for proficiency, or a requirement to see The Picture. At the same time, producing two bodies of work concurrently does satisfy much of my need for a strong studio work-ethic. Working in both camps simultaneously has allowed me to work efficiently and be prolific.

My sculptural and installation work has provided me with an opportunity to analyze my physical relationship with the realities of American life. In these works I have used the materials that I find around me which are, in many cases, very different from those that surrounded me in Britain. In the process of making a work I re-present them as I
understand them. I want to introduce the commonplace to an American audience, which may take these materials for granted. The work is more clarified and self-contained than either the paintings or drawings. More time is spent with both the conception and fabrication of the pieces compared to my paintings. These parallel paths of working allow me to work at two different paces; in a sense, satisfying two different halves of my brain. The paintings leave more room for intuitive decision making. The sculptural pieces provide me with the opportunity to plan.

My planning of the three-dimensional pieces takes place as a long period of playing with the materials that seduce me. I attempt to find out what they can do, and most importantly, what happens when I juxtapose them. As both a formal and conceptual element in my work, juxtaposition exists across everything I make. "What happens when I place this with that?" is a fundamental question throughout my work. Indeed, Marcel Duchamp’s conception of art through juxtaposition of the everyday, is a significant influence on my work. What happens when I place sodas on chairs or wallpaper an office with vacation pictures? These are attempts to create a gestalt somewhere between the elements. The pieces demand a very different audience response than the paintings. The work is quieter, has not to-date included text, and the questions directed toward the audience are more subtle. One might say that a softer form of irony exists here, or a softer tone. A slower reading is necessary. The pieces can stand alone and need not be understood or viewed as a series.
CHAPTER 5

WORK ETHIC AND THE PICTURE MADE PHYSICAL


To create this work I pounded an approximate six-foot by six-foot square grid of four-hundred two-inch nails into a wall. Each nail passes through the centers of six three-and-a-half-inch-square pieces of paper, a dimension taken from Post-it notes. Each paper square is printed with an image of cumulous clouds in a blue sky. The paper squares are skewered, equally spaced along the barrel of each nail, creating a deep carpet of paper. Air is trapped between the small pieces of paper. The squares are twisted unequally around the nails and both interact, and conflict with their neighbors. As a result, the piece is fluffed and fluttered in a cloud-like manner. This formal arrangement characterizes a notion of sky.

Physically, the act of meticulously nailing nearly two-and-a-half thousand pieces of paper to a wall was a personal involvement with studio work-ethic. At the time the piece was made, all of my work dealt directly with laborious process. Conceptually, in a sense, the piece was also an attempt to "nail-down-the-sky". This act was a direct expression of my notion of The Picture, a physical interpretation of a painter's desire to capture the physical and confine it to the picture plane.

The piece is also a strong example of my emphasis on juxtaposition as a formal and theoretical concern. The work was the result of an exploration of the possibilities achievable with a limited vocabulary of materials. The material content which is the title of the piece reflects this scenario. Further, my use of Post-it notes as a material was an
accentuation on work-ethic as subject-matter. As with their inclusion in the painting, *Prozac: Or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love The Bomb*, their configuration was a reference to work schedules. I wanted my use of the material to symbolize a kind of day-dreaming instilled by the repetitive labor of an office-like work-environment: this was a *picture* inspired by the seemingly pointless repetition of an office job that I had just prior to my return to school.

The piece is also significant because it was made at the time that my work tentatively began to leave the constrictions of painting and the picture plane. In retrospect, it symbolizes a link between the wall and space. It marked the end of my apprehensive need for the wall after many years of only painting, and provided the confidence necessary to allow me to work further with found-materials.

5.2. *Nine Reasons to Sit Down, Nine Reasons to Remain Standing.*

In this work, two wooden school chairs, one painted bright red, one bright green, face exactly opposite each other. A two-and-a-half foot gap exists between them. Nine holes are bored into the seat of each chair. In the holes of the green chair, nine hand-blown, tear-drop shaped glass bubbles nest face-down, their apertures pointing toward the floor.

In the holes of the red chair, sit nine similar bubbles with their apertures pointing toward the ceiling. Here, each bubble is filled with a different colored soda, and multi-color “crazy-straws” invite one to sip the drinks.

One of the chairs offers the choice of a refreshing drink, the other does not. In a confounding manner the offering chair is painted a blazing red, the international symbol indicating “danger”, or requesting that you “stop”. The chair offering no refreshment is painted green, encouraging you to “go”.

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The drawing I originally made of these chairs was perceived as a two-dimensional picture and was never intended to be a plan for a three-dimensional work. The idea was originally inspired by a work-ethnic inquiry. Several months before I made the piece, I asked myself the question, “What should I do when I’m not painting?” In response, I visualized a series of chairs that discouraged my sitting down when I should be hard at work. The title and arrangement of this piece reflect the dilemma of such a scenario.

My use of repetition exists formally, as the dialogue between the two chairs, and through my composition of the two groups of nine vessels. My use of the sodas, and my adaptation of the chairs, reflect my distinctive exploration of the materials that I find at hand. Conceptually, I wanted my use of soda-pops, and the quandary of the scenario, to reflect the abundance of choice presented in the United States. This was one of the most immediate observations I made when I first arrived.

5.3  **W.E. 133: Office (Oh Hawaii!)**

In the fall quarter of my second year, I worked as part of a group of art and architecture students in a redundant engineering building. Every member worked site-specifically and, after I investigated the history of the building and explored other possible rooms, I chose to use an abandoned office to create an installation.

On completion, the office was only visible through the two panes of glass in its locked door. Inside the room, all four walls, the floor, a window, another door, a chalk board, notice boards, pipes, vents, all electrical outlets, and air-conditioning unit were covered completely with images of the world taken from travel brochures. Facing the viewer, in the center of the room, sat a desk covered with the detritus of the room’s former occupant. The desk was isolated from the rest of the room by a circle of the original floor tiles, the only area left uncovered. Within this circle everything operated as a normal office would.
The installation was made as a response to the debris left behind by the previous occupant of the space: Professor Richard W. Richardson. Although contact with the professor was possible, I deliberately avoided personal contact so that I was free to invent a personality to fit the name. On reflection, this meant that I projected my own thoughts, notions of work ethics, and my relationship to an office environment into the space.

Principally, it was the discovery of a number of vacation photographs found in the debris of the room that inspired the piece. The picture I perceived on this occasion was the opportunity to give the previous occupant an answer to his dreams: travel. Somehow, however, the occupant is refused the luxury of travel. An overbearing sense of isolation and an inability to escape is actually suggested by the piece. He is surrounded by images of the exotic corners of the world, whilst faced with the realities of the day-to-day running of the office.

Formally, the piece represents the laborious physical process of pasting each image onto the surfaces of the room. This repetitive characteristic closely relates the work to Paper, Nails, Air, Faith. Juxtaposition also operates in the piece. I introduced a foreign element into the office to see if a gestalt could be created in the space that exists between the customary vocabulary of the office and the bizarre substance of the pasted images. By making the piece only visible through the window in the door, the room was also reduced to a picture plane, behind which a painterly tromp-l'oeie picture exists. This image displayed the subject matter of the piece itself, aiming to raise questions about our own relationship to labor. The residue of the occupant was only visible from this viewing window, in a zoo, or museum like mode. The separation apprehended the viewers, halting a physical interaction with the space, and forcing them to become onlookers. In this manner, the piece encouraged the viewers to re-address their own relationship to work.
CHAPTER 6

THESIS EXHIBITION

For my MFA thesis show I decided to exhibit both two- and three-dimensional work. This was my first one-person exhibition, and it provided a valuable opportunity to openly identify the relationships between my work, as presented in this thesis. In addition, the exhibition also provided me with an opportunity to further explore commercialism, packaging and seduction as subject matter in an installation-like manner.

All of the paintings exhibited in the show were packaged in shrink-wrap, and every item on display throughout the exhibition was identified by a sun-shaped fluorescent card label bearing the alternating sales pitches: “You can buy me with American Dollar”, “Love Me, Hug Me, Squeeze Me, Buy Me”, “I can be Yours” and “Take me home Today”. This identification allowed me to use my fondness for text and word-play more extensively than before and also provided me with the opportunity to add previously non-existent textual content to my three-dimensional work. In this manner, the exhibition maintained a beguiling sales approach to display. The humor of this scenario, however, has opened up a series of serious questions I will need to explore if my future work and exhibition opportunities are to be successful.

This was my first opportunity to be able to exhibit both my two- and three-dimensional work in the same environment. Formally this meant that the relationships between my use of repetition, color, and construction materials across all of my work became more evident. The glossy sheen provided by the shrink-wrapped surfaces of the
paintings mirrored the reflections created by the glass vessels of *Nine Reasons to Sit Down, Nine Reasons to Remain Standing*. The grid structure of postage stamps in *All the Hopes and Dreams: A Nine Month Biography* rebounded the lattice-work of pills in the painting, *Prozac: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love The Bomb*. Abstractly, my categorization of found objects such as postage stamps or chairs sat alongside painted descriptions of found images: a milk carton, sheriff's badge or paper airplane.

My decision to package the work in the exhibition also raises questions regarding the individuality of these pieces and their future status. Do I now consider them part of a whole? Am I prepared, for example, to divide the series of seven paintings if they are purchased or requested for another exhibition? Should the aggressively labeled shrink-wrap packaging remain with the work when the pieces are re-exhibited, or will the pieces take on different guises in future scenarios? These are questions to which I do not have answers, but I am conscious that the experience of setting up the exhibition in this manner has excited my appetite for a more complex exploration of the possibilities of installation. Issues such as those surrounding my use of packaging will therefore need to become important considerations in the future.

Layout also became a very real issue once I began to contemplate the space in the exhibition location. I decided to place *Nine Reasons to Sit Down, Nine Reasons to Remain Standing* as the most central piece in the exhibition because I felt that the work most successfully captured the nonsensical, non-utilitarian, seductive quality that I wish to achieve throughout all of my work. However, I became very conscious that the attributes of my thesis show may have been very different had I chosen a different piece to sit centrally. This newly discovered sense of the center stage, together with the stimulating experience I had working on my project in the office of the W.E. building further excites my aspirations for future installation projects.
I have only become involved with the making of three dimensional work over the past twelve months. I feel I have handled my approach successfully, but the experience of collating an exhibition of my work in a large space has raised issues about space and location. The next time I become involved in a similar event, I will need to closely examine the relationships between my pieces and their surrounding space. In a sense, dealing with the space of the exhibition meant that for the first time in my career, I had to begin to think more like a sculptor than a painter, having to become much more aware of the immediate environment of my work. In my thesis show, I got my first taste of what it means to deal with distancing and volume, and it has opened up grand, complex, and therefore interesting possibilities for the future of my work.
Figure 1. All the Hopes and Dreams: A Nine Month Biography.

1' x 1' x 2". June 1997.
Figure 2. Paper, Nails, Air, Faith.

6’ x 6’ x 2”. January 1997.
Figure 3. Nine Reasons to Sit Down, Nine Reasons to Remain Standing.
6' x 2' x 3'. December 1997.
Figure 4. Paying the Cost to the Boss

5' x 5'. January 1998.
Figure 5. W.E. 133: Office (Oh Hawaii!)

24’ x 18’ x 12’. December 1997.
Figure 6. Truth, Justice, Start the American Day.

5' x 5'. March 1998.
Figure 7. The Impossibility of Living in the Mind of Someone who is already Famous.
5' x 5'. February 1998.
Figure 8. Prozac: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love The Bomb.

5’ x 5’.March 1998.
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