Waste and Want

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By

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Abstract

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What is a beginning or end, right or wrong, dirty or clean? My work explores the ideas of appropriateness and familiarity. The link between the man-made and natural worlds triggers primal instincts and challenges ideas of social norms and taboos surrounding the body, sex, and death. Food, images or casts of the body, furniture, and forms used in the act of cleansing are presented in both a graphic and physical manner. Original objects and imagery are consumed and regurgitated causing self-referential echoes of previous works. Desires corresponding to food, sexuality, and the curiosity of decay, are explored by relating the fresh to the old, the clean to the dirty, and the strong to the fragile.
Waste and Want

My mother was a single parent and struggled to take care of me and my siblings as she was busy working to support us. Consequently my siblings and I spent most of our time with our grandmother. She is a wonderful woman with a caring heart, but she has an obsession, a disease, which eventually was passed down to her son, my uncle, and my brothers. She is a hoarder. As I grew up and played in her home I was surrounded by mountains and seas of stuff. Clothes, furniture, boxes, toys, papers, photographs, and even food were piled to the ceilings and covered most of the floors leaving only a narrow pathway in which to inhabit. Accumulation and excess were a way of life. Things, all sorts of things held value to the soul. Objects were part of my grandmother. She was emotionally involved with them. At a very young age I became extremely familiar with the process of decay. I watched the life cycle of objects from their birth into the home as functioning stable forms to their death as broken bits of decay. To my grandmother, everything held the same value no matter where it lied in this cycle. A moldy piece of bread, an expired can of food, a broken piece of a drawer or a ripped stained shirt were all as important as the fresh food, furniture, and clothing brought in. I couldn’t help but ponder the idea of value and where it comes from. How do we define what is worth keeping and cherishing? Who decides what is desirable?

These curiosities are embedded in my being and are very much present in my mind as I make my work. I explore and compare the life cycle of objects and the body and notions of value and desire in terms of both. I challenge social norms and taboos that are defined by the media and religion by questioning the purpose of forms. I pose ques
tions that challenge how we define our world, our desires, our fears and our purpose.

What is right and wrong, desirable or disgusting? I explore how we separate ourselves from the animal/natural world shunning sex, dirt and decay but inviting the consumption of meat and animal byproducts. Ultimately I aim to challenge common notions of reality and how we define it.

Because of my upbringing I adopt hoarding as a process in my work. I collect things that would normally be viewed as worthless, things that are falling apart, soiled, and cast away. I repurpose these objects and make them desirable again. By frosting a found mattress, sewing kiddy pools together with human hair, or constructing a vinyl replica of a found couch cushion, adorning it with silk screened nipples and stuffing it with butter I explore the ideas of worth and value and how they are determined by desires relating to cleanliness, strength, hunger and sexuality. Our societal desires are shaped in part by the media and religion. Sex, strength and food are value in the media and cleanliness is that of religion. The media serves us a daily dose of beauty and lust for both the body and food. Religion (western religion) encourages us to cleanse ourselves from such sins as lust, vanity and gluttony and separate ourselves from the primitive natural world and the subservient “animal” kingdom. Ultimately, my work seeks to invert desires. It causes the viewer to lust or salivate over the thought of eating a mattress or sucking on a couch cushion posing as a breast, and it repulses the idea of eating food even if it is kept clean. It does so to challenge the mind to question the constructs of desires.
The body is the essence of sculpture, it is our physical existence in this world. A hoarder’s body goes beyond their skin, it grows with every object they accumulate. Even our own bodies go beyond our own physical understanding. Before our bodies are solidified under our skin, they exist in the form of food. Food which derives from the bodies of plants and animals. When we ingest these plants and animals the flesh that once composed their body becomes the flesh that composes our own bodies. After we carry around this new flesh and it successfully merges with the old it eventually flees from us in the form of bodily secretions and dead skin (blood, sweat, tears, drool, seaman, discharge, urine, feces, skin, hair, nails etc.). Physical objects influence the way we live and think and impact us on physical, emotional and mental levels. I am interested in the interaction of body and objects and the boundary between the two. The space where the body ends and the object begins. Often times we use objects so much that they hold not only the essence of our bodies but the actual physical evidence of our existence in the form of shedding and secretions. The body after it is the body that we understand still lives with us in our most frequently used spaces and objects such as mattresses, couches, baths, showers etc. These are places of rest, comfort and cleansing. The skin is permeable. The body is dependent on its environment. Body and object relationships are explored as the human body is related to the domestic and natural worlds. The human body is always present in my work whether or not it is physically or visually evident. The objects and imagery I work with become the human body and vice versa. Human, object, and animal are interchangeable.
In *Wreath* (Fig. 1) I silkscreened archetypal imagery of dairy cows, cheese, and hotdogs onto a prefabricated shower curtain and paired with a digital image of a female breast with an exposed un-groomed nipple. The curtain is a symbol of intimacy and reveal. It separates and hides the vulnerable. It references the veiled woman in religious and art history. From the countless historical representations of Mary and Jesus including Duccio’s *Madonna and Child* ca.1290-1300 (Fig. A) to Janine Antoni’s modern take on the veiled woman in *Saddle* (2000), the veil has been a tool to separate hide and control women. In my work I use the veil or curtain as a more all encompassing divider of not just the female body but all bodies. Sexuality and natural form are hidden in today’s world as old traditions persist to rule social norms. In this work the shower curtain acts as the veil, but as a shower curtain it has multiple functions. It not only acts to conceal but it also creates a controlled cleansing environment to cleanse us of our sins and our physical filth. After all, cleanliness is next to godliness. As such it becomes an unintended object of collection. Overtime a cocktail of soap, dead skin, and secretions build up and the curtain becomes a refuge for the body after it parts from itself. The cow and its products symbolize the animal world and human relations to it. The images are processed just as the animals and their products are in today’s food industry.

Silk screening references the commercial world and production. We live in a world of inauthenticity where “signature is replaced by logo” and simulacrum is more desirable than original (Art 21 McCarthey). Silkscreening graphically minimized animal based imagery emphasizes this idea and the disconnect between the human and animal worlds. Rob Bartram author of “Nature, Art and Indifference” believes that we create a
simulacral version of the animal world in order to objectify it and separate it from our own existence (Bartram). The nipple however, is a digital print of a real nipple. It does not abstract in order to be more digestible. It is unapologetically honest. It stand up against social and religious oppression as it declares itself and its existence. Women have nipples and hair on their nipples. The clinical manner in which the nipple is photographed challenges the media’s portrayal of the overly sexualized female body and exposes the reality of itself, yes as a sexually functioning body part but it is also simply a functioning part of our body. The nipple becomes desexualized. The imagery on the curtain and the nipple create a comparison of animal to human as objects of desire and objects of function. The shower curtain and the nipple combat abjection and declare it both primal, in terms of decay and death as evidence of decay on the shower curtain, and socially constructed as the tainted un-groomed nipple. A challenge of religion and social norms becomes present in the act of cleansing, separation of animal and human, and the rejection of sex.

Damien Hirst’s Natural History series, particularly his work *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (Fig. B), challenges the boundaries between these two worlds. It literally frames an unreal representation of the natural world and death as it strips a Tiger shark from its natural environment and presents it in a similar to such environment floating in formaldehyde. By decontextualizing the shark from its natural environment, Hirst is able to apply his own ideas and meanings to it. In my work I often decontextualized objects and imagery in order to convey my ideas. The shark is dead but it floats as if it is alive. The work provides an opportunity for viewers to ob
serve death in its physicality but like the false environment and presentation, the appearance of the shark’s corpse is also controlled. Hirst bought the shark after it had been killed without any marks, damage or evidence of violence, and he admits his plans to change the shark and upkeep the pristine qualities of it and its case as time passes and the shark begins to decay. Controlling the state of the shark proves that *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* is not really about decay but the state of death and only the potential for decay. The piece consequently reflects the control we have on the animal kingdom and natural world and exposes the simulacral framed version of it that we interact with and understand. Hirst believes that we deal with death by detachment or amusement, which is the same way in which we deal with the natural world, as a distant world or a spectacle (Bartram). Hirst’s work challenges contemporary constructed belief systems, of nature as separate and death as myth. Hirst and I share major themes of potential for decay and preservation.

For *Jugs* (Fig. 2), I casted my feet in combination with two plastic milk jugs so that they morph together at the ankles. The casts are hollow plastic vessels filled with fresh milk that is replenished each day. Both feet and milk are symbols of life and livelihood. Feet are our physical connection to the earth. They are our mobility and in such our freedom, and milk is our first source of nutrients once we enter this world. Why is it then that milk is praised and feet are considered abject. *Jugs* poses this question and pushes the common understanding of both. The milk inside of the jugs in this work is cow’s milk. Cow’s milk although still nutritious comes from an animal’s body. As humans ingest it they reject the idea that humans are separate from animals and literally in
vite animal body to become a part of their own, much like the hybrid qualities of _Jugs_.

The cow’s milk is also present day cow’s milk bought at a store in a plastic container. The container is a symbol or stand in for the body, it is a vessel. However, the container is a mass produced object. It is a plastic cast and in such it symbolizes industrialization, consumerism, modernity and falsehood. The denial of human relations to the natural world and animal kingdom is apparent as our society views drinking out of a plastic container as clean and sterile as it hides and shuns breastfeeding without considering the inverse health benefits of breastfeeding and the potential harms of plastic seeping into our food and eventually our bodies. The milk is also a product of industry. Yes it is from a cow, but it is so processed it becomes a frankenstein food. As the human world tries to separate itself from the "primal" animal kingdom this work draws attention to the connections between the worlds and claims them as one in the same. As the human and animal worlds meet in this work, ideas of natural and unnatural, pure and tainted and animal human become skewed.

The body before it becomes the body dwells in the form of food. Cake, meat, cheese, milk, and butter are used as substitutes for the body in my work. Food is the essence of life as it is nutritious and necessary. Before we can grow we must be fed. However, as our bodies grow parts of us must die and be abjected. Food and its ephemeral qualities parallel the fragility of the body and the inevitable decay of it. Cake is a desirable, celebratory, decadent food. It is sweet and it is soft. Meet, cheese, milk and butter come from the cow and in such the animal kingdom. The combination of these foods compare the difference and similarities between human and animal and express the hu
man control of animal world. They also reference our over processed food industry and bring up ideas about purity and preservation.

The cycle of life and decay that I frequently observed at my grandmother’s home causes me to be curious about the cycle of decay of the human body. The body before and after it is the body is a major theme in my work. Our body is a sack. A sack of fluid, flesh and bone. A sack that is constantly consuming and constantly shedding. The idea of the body “before and after” refers to food and decay.

*Out of sight out of mind* (Fig. 3) is a vinyl couch cushion inspired and constructed after the dimensions of a collected couch cushion that had been cast away or abjected from its owner. It is made of vinyl or plastic transparent fabric, includes all the amenities of the original cushion including zipper and buttons and is silkscreened with a polka dot like nipple pattern remnant of the floral patterns often used to decorate such forms. The cushion could be functional however instead of being stuffed with conventional upholstery stuffing it is stuffed with roughly seventy pounds of butter. Similar to Joseph Beuy’s *Fat Chair* (Fig. C), where fat is sculpted in the form of a wedge on a chair, butter in *Out of sight out of mind* becomes a stand-in for the body as human fat and flesh—desirable and grotesque as it oozes, seeps and sweats. Associated with excess and waste fat is inelegant, gross, ugly, and undeniably abject. Yet it is vital to life as our bodies sustain themselves by metabolizing fat in order to produce the energy necessary for bodily functions (Taylor). Cushions are vessels or holders for the body, and collectors of the body after itself. They are symbols of growth and decay, of time and ultimately symbols of what once was and now is—the body after itself. The work expresses the body as a sack of ab
ject. A sack of fat. A sack of life and a sack of decay. An undeniable physical evidence of our mortality. The fat qualities of the butter and the nipple pattern on the surface of the form create a breast like sack. A somewhat synthetic and over processed breast, true to modern society, but nonetheless a breast— the primary source of life/nutrients. The two opposite ideas the beginnings and ends of life are present in this piece. Sex and Death. Desire and Disgust.

Mother and Child (Fig. 4) is a work where a found industrial sink and a farmer’s milk bucket are “linked” together with a raw sausage link. One end of the link is stuffed into the back of the sink drain up against the drain filter reminiscent of a meat grinder. From there it drapes down to the floor where it meanders for a few feet and then ascended back up into a milk bucket where a couple links float in a few inches of water at the bottom of the bucket. A wash cloth is draped over the side of the bucket functionally waiting to be used. This work is about sex, birth, and decay. It represents the cycle of life and it reflects modern societal norms and taboos involving the body and industry.

My work explores human animal relations with the cow and its byproducts as the staple for the animal world and our relation to it. Janine Antoni’s works 2038 (Fig. D), Eureka (Fig. E), and Saddle (Fig. F) also explore similar human cow correlations. In 2038 Antoni bathes in a trough while a cow drinks from the water. The work is captured in a form of an image where the cow looks as if it is nursing from Antoni herself. In this work the role of human and cow is reversed as Antoni becomes the site of nourishment (Art:21). We drink milk from the cow and consume its body daily, and here Antonio is nursing the cow with her body as she lays in the troth. The consumer becomes the con
sumed. The work is entitled 2038 because the cow is tagged in its ear with a tag that reads 2038. Antoni states that she titled this work this way because she felt that it “epitomized our relation to the cow” as “hardly an animal but biological machine” (Art:21). The mother child relationship that is formed between Antoni and the cow references all of the great works of the Madona and child. Antoni points out the role of the Madonna as one of a woman that is not allowed to be physically active unless she is nursing, as she cannot have sex or even die (Antoni). 2038 exemplifies the place of animals in the human world as a product of consumption, but also displays a compassionate human animal relationship. In Eureka Antoni is dipped into a bathtub filled with lard which is accompanied by a mound of lard that represents the displacement of her body. The work compares human and animal physicality and body with fat. The bath references human cleansing and animal nourishment as it references the trough, but in this case the idea of cleansing is inverted. Antoni does not bathe to cleanse herself from the animal world rather, she bathes within it. The work is also about positive and negative space as it references the the phalus and its counterpart, the lingum and yoni, two opposingly dependent forms. Saddle is a cowhide that is draped and then stiffened over the form of Antoni’s cast body on her hands and knees. In this work Antoni states that she is exploring her relationship with the animal as she compares the role of the veiled woman to the submissive role of the cow (Antoni).

Human identity is shaped by the domestic realm. Where we dwell in terms of space and furniture reflects the way we understand our physical and emotional existance. Abjeting the domestic is abjeting the self. I find inspiration in the Work of Robert Gob
er who's work consists of domestic familiar objects, limbs and religious symbolism among other things. Domestic forms are altered into surreal interpretations of themselves. Sinks are stretched, cribs are twisted and drains are placed in the most peculiar of places including limbs, toro like sacs, and patches of earth. Gober’s work intrigues with its peculiarity and abjects with its rawness. It lives between the common and the surreal, the familiar and absurd, the funny and dreadful as it challenges socio-political, and religious structures. It is about social justice, freedom, and tolerance.

In *Shed* (Fig. 5) I reclaim a found floral twin mattress which was left curbside. The mattress is placed on the ground, and then frosted like a cake. It lays in front of a wall patterned with unapologetically exposed graphically minimized nipples. Two nipples are adorned with hair as if it was growing naturally around them from within the wall. The mattress is a timeline of life lived. It is the site for the cycle of birth and decay. It is used, and in such is filled with dead skin and bodily secretions. It is a refuge for the body after it parts from itself. It is the physical evidence of our mortality. Frosting is celebratory. It is decadent and desirable, and it symbolizes purity and preservation. When paired together, a deceivingly inedible hybrid object is born that activates space with an overwhelming smell of sweetness. Preservation and decay and repulsion and desire are present as ideas of the body are challenged. Symbolism and tradition are embedded in the frosting of the mattress as it becomes a white cake referencing a wedding cake. In *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History*, author Simon Charsley writes that the wedding cake is a symbol of the bride, a representation of the white dress and the bride's virginity as it would be stained with evidence of it. The cake like the bride’s virginity is defiled, cut
and consumed (Charsley). This symbolic tradition brings the element of sex and ideas about virginity and desirability into the work. Comparing the loss of virginity to the death of the body. Worth becomes existence. As the nipples are graphically stripped, they become desexualized symbols of themselves. They reflect the abstraction of the body and the natural world in modern media fed imagery. By casting, or stenciling objects and imagery, I create simulacral imitations that are more easily digestible as they become further removed from their original form. Like modern day celebrities, as an object or image becomes more symbolized it begins to escape reality and enter fantasy and consequently becomes more desirable. This is how we already view the natural world as animals become friendly and stuffed or brightly colored and playful such as images on a shower curtain or on the walls of a child’s room. Repetition also elevates the status of the nipple as it becomes familiar it denies its offenses and liberates itself against its taboos. However, once the nipples are adorned with hair, fantasy is rejected and the uncanny world is invited in. The nipples begin to live in a world between reality and abstraction, horror and comfort. Conflicting ideas surrounding what is dirty or clean, appropriate or improper, and real or fake are used to pose questions about mortality and morality.

In my work Untitled (deconstructed vacuum and cake) (Fig. 6) an unkept metal vacuum is deconstructed and the internal industrial orifices are exposed. Three pieces of the vacuum are hung at average mouth, nipple and genitalia height on a wall. Three white frosted cakes are made sized to each corresponding orifice and are placed on the floor beneath each part but slightly forward as if they had been defecated from each part, although the cake is pristine and uncompromised. Positive and negative space is activated.
Female an male counterparts are present, although again roles are reversed. The typically male phallus or positive form is a white cake symbolizing female virginity, and the negative normally female form is made of metal and industrial parts which are stereotypes of manhood. As the roles reverse, identifiers of gender worth are challenged. This work also confuses the direction of forms. The cake looks as if it is both meant to penetrate the orifices and/or that it has been dedicated from them. This kind of confusion of material and form in reference to the body is apparent in Paul MCarthy’s Chocolate Factory as chocolate treats are made in the form of butt plugs. McCarthy’s sweet treats arouse and disgust as they fulfill both a sexual and primal urge to feed. Both my Untitled (deconstructed vacuum and cake) and McCarthey’s Chocolate Factory (Fig. G) shed light on the pleasure of the simplest natural functions of the body as they are necessary to life. Absurdity is the root of this work as it seeks to pervert and seduce.
Conclusion

My goal as an artist is to pose questions. To shed light on contradictions and injustices in our world and give people a different perspective, allowing them to step out of their own world and consider that another. I hope to make people feel, wether it be happy, sad, disgusted or aroused, I hope to make people feel. Feel their physical and emotional response to material and imagery and hopefully through the contradiction of common desires and familiarity aim to rattle their belief systems and cause them to become more open minded. Most of all I want people to feel comfort and find peace and belonging with in my work. I want it to be oddly familiar and refreshing in its absurdity and truths.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Fig. 1 *Wreath*, Shower curtain, Acrylic ink, Digital Print, Dimensions Variable, 2015
Fig. 2  *Jugs*, (In Progress; Plaster Possitive) Plastic, Milk, 10” x 4” 10” each, 2015
Fig. 3 *Out of Sight Out of Mind*, Vinyl, Acrylic Ink, Butter, Buttons, Thread, 5”x 22” x 18”, 2014
Fig. 4 *Mother and Child*, Sink, Sausage Link, Milk Bucket, Washcloth, Water, Dimensions Variable, 2014
Fig. 5 *Shed*, Found Mattress, Frosting, Acrylic Paint, Hair, Dimensions Variable, 2015
Fig. 6 Untitled (Deconstructed Vacuum and Cake), Vacuum Parts, cake, 6’ × 4’ × 1’, 2013
Fig. A Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna and Child*, c.1300
Fig. C Joseph Beuys, Fat Chair, 1964. Lard and Wooden Chair.
Fig. D Janine Antoni, 2038, 2000. C-Print.
Fig. E Janine Antoni, Eureka, 1993. Bathtub, Lard, Soap, Corian.
Fig. F Janine Antoni, Saddle, 2000. Full Raw Hide; Cast of Artist’s Body.
Fig. G Paul McCarthy, Chocolate Factory (Individual Butt Plug), 2014. Chocolate.