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Projected idol: a madman's obsession

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PROJECTED IDOL:
A MADMAN'S OBSESSION

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in
The School of Art

by
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M.A., University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 1998
August, 2002

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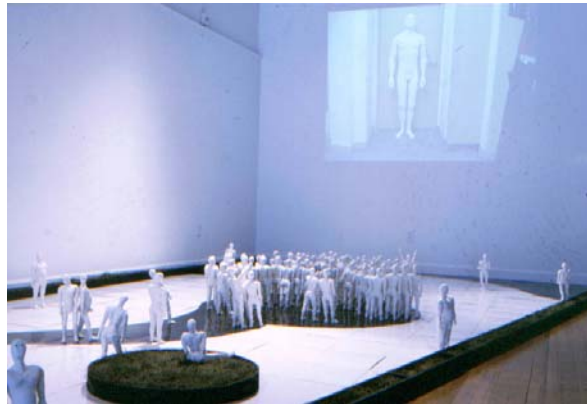
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Abstract

My art work explores societal issues and the effects of accepted norms on the public and on myself. The baseline issue is security. People will go to extremes to feel secure! My goal is to create images that will start a dialog that addresses these issues and disseminates information that will cause social change.

Projected Idol: a madman's obsession is a sculptural installation (1.1) that examines the theme of the ideal male body image in western culture and the mixed signals that are projected through mass media. These conflicting images play a direct role in the security or insecurity of people in the name of economics. This work, begun in 2001 and completed in the spring of 2002, represents the focus of these ideas.



1. 1 Projected Idol: a madman's obsession
Installation view (detail-a).

Introduction

How does a society arrive at an ideal body image? Who decides what this image will be?

At what point does the public accept this image? Does the public not notice or do they just choose to ignore the conflicts between this projected imagery and the realities of our

bodies? How do these opposing forces affect people on a psychological level? The starting point for my thesis is the image of the male store mannequin (1.2) representing the ideal that our society has chosen for men. Video, audio, the male form, and a controlled environment become the vehicle for my ideas and observations.



1. 2 Male store mannequin

Origin of Personal Issues

In my youth, I was physically small for my age. At four feet ten inches tall and approximately 90 pounds throughout high school, I was out of place with my peer group. My larger, muscular brothers seemed to make friends and be accepted into groups with relative ease. I was envious of them and wanted to be the same as everybody else. I longed for the day I could walk into a store and buy my clothing from the “regular” clothes rack. My physical differences did nothing to build my self-confidence and led my peers to treat me with condescension and disregard, and my ever growing insecurities only resulted in further rejection by my peers.

Later, at eighteen years of age, I began to grow. By the time I was 19, I finally achieved the physical stature of an adult male. I was the ideal male body type and my confidence abounded. I was readily accepted, and I could buy clothes from the “ready to wear” section; however, I was still extremely self-conscious.

Now, at 38 years of age, my idea of my body image has shifted. I am paranoid of becoming obese. I cannot return to the body of that ideal without a constant physical program, and I do not have the drive to create one. I feel sedentary. I am insecure and I do not wish to follow the path of my family who struggle with obesity and the accompanying health risks. I am vain, but I do not wish to let vanity get in the way of logic.

Historical and Observational Reference

Projected Idol: a madman's obsession was conceived from a brief look at societies throughout history and long-term observations of the world around me. This work is at once a deeply personal introspection of my own fears and an examination of how pervasive societal and economic forces create a psychological battlefield for many men.

Historically, cultures across the world have chosen an ideal body image with little regard for their natural physical characteristics. For instance, the Greeks idealized Adonis, a youthful, tall, lean male, even though Greek men were typically short, barrel-chested men. Some cultures proceeded to find methods of manipulating their form. For example, the Egyptians bound parts of their bodies to change shapes. Other societies utilized (and continue to utilize) scarification, tattoos, and skin-stretching customs. Modern, western cultures continue to evolve our own practices of changing body shapes. I believe that the Greek's Adonis and other societies' physique aesthetics continue to influence western society. Scientific advances have made it possible to extend or shorten bone, reduce skin and fat, or to add size. Plastic surgery is becoming one of our cultural rituals.

Other influences on our society derive from a grand economic greed. The same marketing machine that bombards with imagery projecting a perfect male body also assaults with advertisements promoting over-consumptive, sedentary lifestyles – but fails to inform that these things are mutually exclusive. The result: an obese America for whom the marketing machine is happy to supply a miracle cure in the form of diet pills, no-pain exercise gadgets and plastic surgery. These incongruous images projected by mass media cause psychological insecurity.

Description of Art Work

Projected Idol: a madman's obsession is a mixed media installation that occupies 760 sq. ft., includes over 200 white ceramic figurative sculptures, projected video images, projected text, floor tiles, and a convex mirror.

The architectural space is addressed with floor tiles that describe a specific area for the ceramic figures and control the viewer's space. The tiles begin in a glass store front in a typical checker pattern that is two feet wide and approximately 25 feet long. Also within the store front is a small tiered stage where some of the ceramic figures are placed. One figure on the stage reacts to the activity in the gallery. Some of the figures appear to be climbing down from the stage to begin their journey into the gallery to investigate. Other figures in the window act out their own interactions, and a few appear to address the viewer directly.

Once in the gallery, the floor tile continues the checkered pattern for a short distance then changes to an abstract shape in black surrounded by white. The figures now begin to enter the interior of the gallery space. They gather in a seemingly chaotic crowd with some beginning to traverse the floor into the abstract black area. While in the checkered area, the white ceramic figures seem to partially disappear in and out of the floor. Once on the solid black space, the figures stand out in severe contrast. Most follow, staying inside the black area (1.3).



1.3 Projected Idol: a madman's obsession
Installation view (detail-b).

They increasingly become more organized. At the end of the abstract black form, they gather uniformly, transfixed by the projected video. A few figures move outside the

designated black area into the surrounding white area where they start to blend into the floor and become lost. Some find refuge in two other black areas, separate from the larger group.

The projected video image is of the perfect male mannequin interrupted by flashes of reference images that bombard the viewer with recognizable restaurant signs, directional signs, diet supplement products and advertisements, people moving in mass, and me as the idol.

The projected text questions the viewer. The convex mirror slims the viewer who stands before it.

Conclusion

My art work illustrates an opinion on the human condition within western civilization. The absurdity of people following an ideal that is unobtainable for the majority but perpetuated by a minority is confusing to say the least. Focusing attention on the irrationality of people blindly following the crowd is intended to create dialog -- the first step to creating changes in societal attitudes. We are the consumers that support this absurdity, and we have the power to change it.

Vita

Aaron P. Hussey was born December 9th, 1963, third of five children born to Michael P. Hussey Sr. and Nancy C. Rodgers. He and his siblings were raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, and they were exposed to the arts at an early age in spite of the fact that the Hussey family was not in the best of economic situations. The children attended parochial school and, through the efforts of their parents, participated in sports, dance, theatre, music, and visual art. The sports activities did not hold the young Aaron's interest; he tended to gravitate toward the arts and was encouraged to do so. It should also be noted that his father is a skilled painter and illustrator. The weekends spending time in the garage studio of his father and trips to the New Orleans Museum of Art and to the French Quarter, streaming with creative individuals had a lasting effect on Aaron. He continued to make art throughout his early education and high school. After graduation from high school, Aaron did what most people in America do; he got a job. His art was put aside for many years and was never considered a career to pursue. After a job related injury which left him legally blind in one eye, and a disjointed marriage, he decided to enroll at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana. Now at the age of twenty five and with the moral and limited financial support of his mother, Aaron would explore the possibilities and rediscover his passion for art. While studying the required curriculum with science as a focus, he enrolled in an art class for his own enjoyment. He soon found himself changing his focus to visual art. In 1991 he transferred to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He met Michael Warrick, the sculpture professor, and he soon began pursuing a career in art. During 1992 he began to exhibit artwork and in December 1993 he graduated from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock with a Bachelor in Art degree. Following graduation he moved to Houston, Texas, where he secured a job at a material testing lab as a concrete inspector. His past construction experience provided an income. While working as a concrete inspector, he found a job building false rock environments by answering an ad that simply stated "Wanted: artist familiar with concrete construction." He began the task of learning to sculpt rocks and trees in concrete. In 1995 Aaron moved back to New Orleans and took a job as an illustrator for a local textile company. At the end of 1995 he desired to be more involved

in fine art and to return to college. Once again he went to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to pursue a Master of Arts degree. While attending school he worked as an artist for a sign company and later, in 1997, was offered a job as the Sculpture Studio Research Assistant at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. In 1998 Aaron graduated from college with a Master of Arts degree and continued to work at the university as the Studio Research Assistant and teach an occasional sculpture class. In the summer of 1999 Aaron went with a team of artisans to Tahiti to sculpt a false rock environment for a resort hotel and then to California to finish an animal exhibit area at the Sacramento Zoo. In October 1999 he returned to Little Rock and beginning January 2000 taught Beginning Sculpture and 3D-Design as an adjunct instructor at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Central Arkansas respectively. Teaching art was an awakening experience and Aaron realized that he wanted to teach fulltime at the university level; however he needed to continue his own education to pursue this goal. He applied and was accepted to Louisiana State University Graduate School in 2000 and began to study there in September of 2000. While working toward his Master of Fine Arts degree, he continued to exhibit his artwork and to pursue a professional art career. He and mentor/friend, Michael Warrick, received a commission to design and construct a commemorative sculpture at the Central High National Historic Site in Little Rock Arkansas. Work on the large commission started approximately a year into his graduate work and would be completed September 2001. Later, Aaron was awarded another public commission and completed it during the winter of 2002 for the community of Bunkie, Louisiana. In the summer of 2002, Aaron Hussey earned the terminal degree of Master of Fine Arts and looks forward to teaching opportunities and the continued pursuit of a professional art career.