

A Visual Exploration of Non Traditional Identity and Place

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Abstract: The use of gender and sexual inequality in art has a long history. From the paintings depicting Rose Salave's train travels (Duchamp's alter drag ego) to the self-portraits of photographer Cindy Sherman as a thousand different identities, artists have long used the ideas of gender, sexual orientation and social inequality in order to make a larger statement than by words alone about their place in society. The purpose of this study is an ongoing creation of artworks that reflect the ideas of non-traditional identity and the sense of place or placelessness. The works strive to also be readable by a larger viewing audience that just those living non-traditional gender or sexual orientated lives. The artworks are created using elements of symbolism and icons that are reflective of these ideas about inequality in our society and those of my own personal belief system as a gay male. My opinions about place or "home" and identity, become visual questions about why these systems change for peoples with a non-traditional lifestyle. To date, the research has produced approximately 9 paintings and sculptures expressing these ideas. Overall, I want a viewing audience to identify with the works on a broader level. I wish for them to leave paralleling my visual opinions with their own and to question the many social norms that exist in our modern society about the issues presented there in.

1. Introduction

This project started with an assignment by Dr. Royce Smith in the Art History department. Although my research as an artist is similar to this in an every day context, this specific idea of home and identity as applied in the studio arts came from Dr. Smith. The idea was to research a specific artist(s) and apply their styles and idea processes to my own creative process. Although I was already working on such ideas in my graduate work, this specific research jump-started an entire new body of works. This research mainly focused on the writings and works of artist David Wojnarowicz; a prominent New York artist and gay activist in the 1980's who died of AIDS-related illness in 1992 at the age of 37.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

After studying the works and writing of Wojnarowicz, I wrote the following artist statement: "In my work, I record specific periods in my life, both real and imagined, in order to understand their existence. By shaping my past into form and symbolism, I create a lens for the audience to look through that deals specifically with non-traditional gender and sexual roles. I want my audience to parallel my subject matter with their own recollections and to understand the similarities we have on an emotional level. Although the voice of the art is specifically mine, I believe that it has a social and non-gender specific value that can be identified with by others, regardless of their gender or sexual preferences and the roles they provide in their lives.

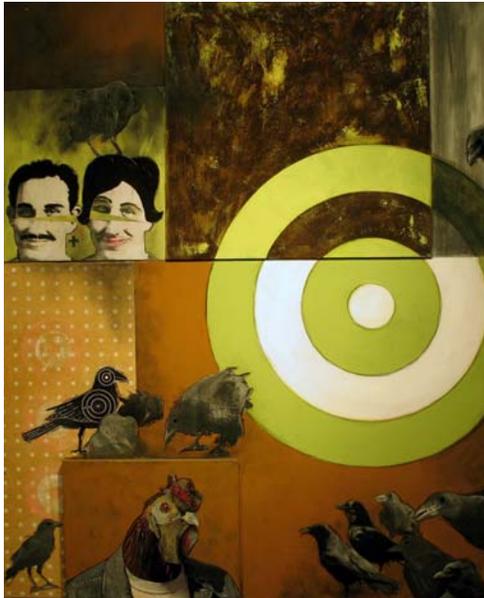
As of recent, the ideas of "home" and the properties associated with it have become very important to the work. My use of materials that are normally indicative of moving or packing have been reformed to become solid structures and trophies of my current life situations. These transient materials represent the fragile nature of the social structure of place [and placelessness] and our overwhelming desire to create such place as an everlasting environment. Representations of hunting trophies, food preservation, household materials generally associated with "women's work" and utility items now become metaphor for this lack of place in my current life."

Wojnarowicz had prompted me to find a more specific idea of what my painting and sculpture should be stating and to utilize a more simplistic voice in creating them

3. Conclusions

After this in depth research on David Wojnarowicz and his work, I produced a solo show to be installed at The Fisch Haus Studios in Wichita, KS. The show consisted of 5 paintings and 4 sculptures that were

on display to the general public from February 23, 2007 to March 23, 2007. I selected the show title of *DISPLACE* due to this specific research and how it had effected my personal ideas and my artwork. My thoughts of home and how to express them were drastically changed to be much more precise and clear in order to speak to the viewing public. References of "man as animal", masculine traits represented with feminine ideas (trophy bucks represented in pink instead of the masculine color of blue for example) and representations of traditional home (both in nature and society) were utilized to produce a clearly vibrant show that received positive public reviews; both written and verbal. Because of this research, I believe that my voice as a visual artist will only continue to gain momentum. The following photographs are from the show resulting of this research.



(Fig. 1) *The Combination of Two, Mixed Media, 2006*



(Fig. 2) *Boy Scout's Honor, Mixed Media, 2006*



(Fig 3) *DISPLACE, Expanded Show Overview, 2007*



Fig 4) *Preservation of Time/ Trophy Buck, Mixed Media, 2007*

4. Acknowledgements

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[1] Wojnarowicz, David. *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 1991

[2] Wojnarowicz, David. *The Waterfront Journals: Introduction by Tony Kushner*. New York: Grove Press, 1996.

[3] Wojnarowicz, David. *Tongues of Flame / edited by Barry Blinderman*. New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1990.