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Marissa Molina

Art Departmental Honors Thesis

Untitled: A Life in Art

When you get into an art program and the reigns are finally let loose, the inevitable occurs: nagging questions begin to surface and leech off your consciousness... What *do* I make? Do I *have* to put meaning behind every brushstroke? How do I make something compelling to the masses *and* myself? Do I experiment? Do I stay with what I know I'm good at?? In the midst of it all it is beyond easy to get lost in a query of self doubt, anxiety, and in a less-than-interesting rut. Despite moments of confusion, panning throughout the food eating phase, candy land attacks, Mylar ink explosions, more transformative pieces, the tightly knit together to the looser, up until to the present work encompassing features from all, my intentions and goals have staunchly remained the same. In all honesty, my work is the reflection of me spitting out the immense congestion that is my head. In the garishly bright worlds I have come to create in ink, oil, and acrylic, I yearn nothing more than to construct an interesting, complete, and amusing existence dominated by people and all the junk that saturates twenty first century life.

As a result of the superfluous generation I thrive in, there are no grand overarching intentions behind my work beyond exploring my fascination with mixing human emotions and narratives through vibrant mediums. When the average individual thinks of art, especially in the presence of a large purely blue canvas or some extravagant performance piece, they envision that artist doling out a deeply complex, intellectual, and supremely convoluted statement that may or may not be able to be backed up by the actual substance he or she created. Even in the high school the notion that everything *had* to have a "meaning" behind it was drilled into the subconscious. Perturbed by this very idea, I stay away from intending any highly specified deeper meaning to be conveyed.

Although there are no grandiose social critiques embedded in my work it would

be callous of me to presume that the outside world has no effect on the aesthetics I have developed and actively incorporate into my style. Looking back through the history of mankind, it has been clear that amassing and immersing oneself in objects, whether natural goods or manufactured contraptions, has become one of the most paramount functions of life. Junk is everywhere. It is what constitutes our oh-so-smelly garbage facilities because, at the core, it is the driving force behind our consumption ridden lives.

On a closer look, be someone a rich celebrity, an average passerby or a selfless individual swearing off indulging in the next new gadget set to enhance our lives; humans can only really understand an individual's persona through its relationship with the stuff it surrounds itself with or lack thereof. That is to say, the attributes of the person one is *will be* encapsulated and amplified by how he or she interacts with objects. Although one would argue that in the past this was never true, that class and stature defined inherit persona, it is difficult to comprehend society without this element. Humans have and will continue to thrive because of the manifestation of tools and the development that has come out of that. With the sheer fact that we are human, *Industrialization happened*. As such, technology and consumption *is* my generation and will continue to be so.

Growing up with a father who rose out of extreme poverty in El Salvador, however, I have been fortunate enough to never fall under the powerful spell of materialism. It is through him, interestingly enough, that instead I have been able to witness how important, trivial, and yet completely natural junk is in society as a whole. For the majority of my life my father has worked in various positions in the sanitation field. I've driven around in the garbage trucks, I know the foul smell that is hopper juice, and I've seen people scavenge for perfectly usable things; rightfully so, I've simply

always associated objects as an extension of people. My notions to fill in scenes with an assortment of things teamed with not only daily experiences with people, but my volunteer experiences abroad and never-ending intrigue in global history have come to shape my focus in my own vein of art to deal with human behavior and interaction amplified by piles of stuff.

All my life I have had an aversion to the artist tradition of “borrowing” and “stealing” aspects of others art to build upon in one’s own work. The biggest paradox in art is that to be successful we must be unique and yet to be successful we are constantly told to copy from our peers and predecessors. Synthesizing and transforming components is the apparent goal, but the struggle to do so is profound. The most common thing people say to describe themselves is unique; and perhaps even though I am aware that people are far more similar than one would like to admit, it is with this same sentiment to be my own distinct person and have others recognize that, that I fight the man and his precedent to extract from other artists. No one wants to regurgitate the same thing again and again; we thirst for new and improved not cheap an overplayed.

It is not to say, however, that I have cut off my mind from experiencing others art and undoubtedly being influenced by things that I have enjoyed and found powerful. From a young age, Leonardo Da Vinci’s grotesques and Francisco Goya’s dark humorous work have consistently intrigued me. Similarly with Rembrandts more silly self portraiture or James Ensors’ fantastic character driven and dark allegorical work, I have found that I have always been drawn to pieces that are less than glamorous. I initially started out with two directions: personified animal portraits and portraits of people eating food in extremely crazy, messy and volatile manners (at least to my mother’s eyes).

Portraiture is characteristically a form of art that caters towards the human concern with appearance. Classically it enhances people's more pleasing features and aims to disguise anything unsightly. Since at the center of my art is an explosion of varying degrees of consumption, amassment of things, objects, animals, and most of all people; depicting people without a façade of glamour allows for those within the scene to be shown in a raw light that has more minute detail and dimension. There is nothing simple about a person and so the convoluted worlds that come out of my portraiture come to represent the chaos and serenity that exist simultaneously. Exposure to these grotesques and my ability to see value in off kilter work has paved way for my work to hold a different interpretation of the classical portrait.

Along with classical art that I have been fortunate enough to gaze at in person, graffiti style work has always been one of the larger influences on my style of drawing and painting. More often graffiti goes beyond restriction in composition and forces passersby to take in its imagery, especially when vibrant colors are used. There is something very strong about this as well as the fact that the art itself becomes part of our surroundings, enforcing the subject matter as part of our natural setting. It is because of this I feel akin to Blu's massive creations, even with his work being predominantly void of color; his work defines the concept of transforming and integrating into an environment. Even so, work that doesn't reach such vast scales or public arenas, like that of Damon Soule, still embody that same vivacious nature and bold sensibilities that make this stylized segment of art so formidable and well received amongst younger generations.

Currently, the contemporary art world finds itself exceedingly conceptually and

socially driven along with a strong vein of performance art (especially video art) and installation. After artists had left behind the clear cut realism that had guided the art world for so long and delved into a plethora of modernist experiments, the inevitable occurred: *everything* had been done. In a real reaction to the predominant conventions alive in art and painting especially, the postmodern mentality was born and continues to guide current art trends. Consequently, “newness” comes out of weird, offsetting acts rather than endeavors meant to break the conventional boundaries.

In a way, my work adheres to the postmodernist complacency; I know that the art I make won't completely change the face of painting for the next few decades aside from adding to the cannon that already exists. Instead of being concerned with trying to formulate a new type of mark making and process, the focus behind making my pieces lies in the evolution of how I construct objects, space, animals, and people in a compelling and successful manner that leaves me content with the piece's ability to personify the subject matter and amuse myself.

Although conceptual and performance art have their own merit, the effect given off really has nothing to do with my aesthetics. My process involves a more old school method of working; hand-made and very practical. My matte board work is easily stackable or cut and put together with tape depending on my needs. All of the work painted on canvas is stretched and gessoed on my wall without the constrictions of wooden stretchers; lending to the organic shapes I cut to enhance this sort of careful juxtaposition of people and junk ostensibly becoming part of the people as well as make transporting it beyond simple. Despite my imposing scale increase, everything remains extremely portable. All of the people in the work are of friends and family I'm

surrounded by taken from photographs captured on my less-than-spectacular camera. Even to add a 3-Dimensional or textured aspect, I Paper Mache straight onto the canvas. If I am going to make art, I'm going to be involved. End of story.

Beyond the hundreds of pictures I take of friends and family at various points of one day, color and material are the greatest determinants as to what the end result will be within any given piece. In the same fashion of how objects work to characterize a person in a distinct way, the medium and material I'm working with will call for a different concoction of my main elements. Largely, at the core of the intuitive construction process is dynamic of what is being dictated by the material being utilized. Color, however, is extremely important in my work, if not the real essence of it. No black whatsoever appears in any of my paintings. For me, colors are the most expressive of tools we are allocated in life. They vibrate energy. It is due to my lifelong obsession with color (probably initiated by being doused in the bright colors the decorated my house and culture), that I am not afraid to force my garish paints to work in unison and create something fun and engaging.

In my floating worlds of color, moments of tension, bizarre interactions, and convoluted existences, I just want to show the world and people how I see them; how the world really is. Not everything is clear because there are so many different dimensions to what is going on and because I'm more presenting a narrative that is meant to be clarified by the viewer's own thoughts. Twenty-first century life is full of junk, and I cannot help but paint that chaos.