

ABSTRACT

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Perry Wesley Johnson, Masters Of Fine Arts,
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Directed By: Prof. Foon Sham
Department of Art

I distinctly remember when, as a child, I abruptly realized my parents were not superheroes—that they could not always protect me. Suddenly the world was a dangerous place where the adults had lost control. During the day, walking home from school I imagined criminals everywhere, while at night ghosts, aliens and demons came out to feed.

The feeling that the world is hostile remains with me now as an adult. Although many of the things I worried about as a child were based on fiction my obsessions remain. Ghosts and demons have been replaced by a host of very real and complex, factual nightmares. We are all engaged in a network of competing forces that we, as individuals, have no control over.

My artwork addresses my anxieties and obsessions. It is a small act of resistance against an overwhelming and complicated world. Art making is the tool I employ to isolate and articulate the larger systems at work that I perceive as problematic and terrifying. The work addresses forces outside my control that I can

only communicate upon through the use of irony, sarcasm and humor. Hidden under clean lines and symmetrical form, I mock the world at large, the viewer and me.

Somehow, the process of being ridiculous makes the world a better place.

GHOSTS AND DEMONS

By

Perry W. Johnson.

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Advisory Committee:

Prof. Foon Sham

Prof. John Ruppert

Assistant Prof. Brandon Morse

Assistant Prof. Dawn Gavin

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Chapter 1: Beginning

I distinctly remember when, as a child, I abruptly realized my parents were not superheroes—that they could not always protect me. Suddenly the world was a dangerous place where the adults had lost control. During the day, walking home from school, I imagined criminals everywhere, while at night ghosts, aliens and demons came out to feed.

The feeling that the world is hostile remains with me now as an adult. Although many of the things I worried about as a child were based on fiction my obsessions remain. Ghosts and demons have been replaced by very real and complex, factual nightmares.

Turn on a television or look in the newspaper and you'll see what I mean. The distribution of wealth in the hands of a few, the current government administration, murder on the streets, pollution, racism, world population growth and genocide are just a few of the topics that concern me. We're all engaged in a network of competing forces that we, as individuals, have no control over.

I'm a pessimist, I feel the world is a bad place and things only get worse. My thinking leads me down a precarious path, a dark mental state that is hard to come out of.

I never met my Grandmother but her spirit permeated my childhood. She was a journalist and a minister in the Methodist Church. She was charismatic, beautiful and brilliant. Through it all she suffered bouts of bipolar mood disorder. In 1979 she committed suicide. I'm like her in many of ways. Suicide is not an answer, however, and I've found another way.

My artwork addresses my anxieties and obsessions. It is a small act of resistance against this overwhelming and complicated world. Art making is the tool I employ to isolate and articulate the larger systems at work that I perceive as problematic and terrifying. The work addresses forces outside of my control that I can only communicate upon through the use of irony, sarcasm and humor. With my work, I mock the world at large, the viewer and me. By making structures or scenarios that are reflections of sinister and contradictory systems active in my environment, I inform and enrich my audience and myself.

The process of being ridiculous makes the world a better place. Humor is a way of transforming a dark world view into an entertaining and informative game which is worth staying alive and participating in.

Chapter 2: End

“The Coffin,” is a mobile and interactive structure. Made of sheathing plywood and 2’x4’s, it is constructed to be a shipping crate. The top view reveals that it’s in the shape of a coffin. The coffin is laid flat on the ground but its height is extended to six feet, allowing its occupant to stand inside and move around. Being alive in this box is akin to being dead and laying flat.

When I enter the Coffin I ritually pass over, killing myself. This is my suicide machine. But death in the box is not the end; it is a hell where penance must be paid. As in life, death is a constrictive space governed by external forces. Mounted on the front exterior panel of the Coffin is an electric drum machine that is linked to four speakers housed within the coffin. The music plays inside at a deafening level, from the exterior it is indistinct and muffled. Above the drum machine is a door peep-hole which the viewer may use to see the interior space.

When I’m in the coffin, the viewer is in control of the entire situation. The door is locked from the outside and control over air and light is placed in the hands of the participant. I have set a few rules for myself to follow while in the coffin. Whenever the drum machine is played, I dance to the music. My movements within the Coffin are ridiculous. Having no real space, the dance is reduced to absurd and pathetic gyrations. I continue to dance until the music is turned off regardless of my physical state. The duration of the performance is determined by the viewer and is not complete until the door of the coffin is unlocked and opened.

The coffin is a manifestation of my fears and anxieties concerning the brutalities of life and the inevitable end. By mimicking the unbearable I mock it,

poking fun at the entire situation. Fun converts the horrific into something manageable.

My personal obsessions and neurosis are remedied through public ritual. The interaction of others allows them also to purge their fears in a communal fashion. An environment of fun and play, one of ridicule and satire, allows us to mediate the unbearable.

Images

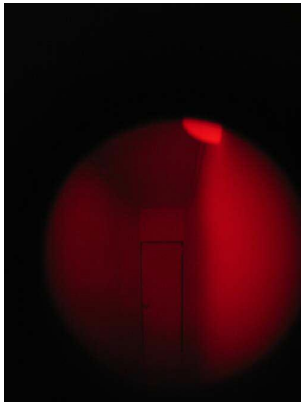
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