

Presently Post Modern

The museum, Fine Art, and the viewer's idea of status within these institutions are all ideologies. These ideologies are reinforced through our participation in them, acting them out as though they are natural. Photography has a specific cultural context that allows me to utilize it to redisplay the ideologies of the viewer to the viewer.

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Dedicated to my loving wife Chelsie.

Without her selfless support this could not have been created.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF Plates.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: A Rapid Culture Shift.....	1
CHAPTER 2: Fine Art:Artist:Viewer.....	4
CHAPTER 3: Who Encounters Art.....	9
CHAPTER 4: The Work.....	11
CHAPTER 5: Conclusion.....	21
REFERENCES.....	23

LIST OF PLATES

Figure 1) Psychostrategies Of Avante-garde Art, lolz.... 11



Figure 2) Mechanical Reproduction, nom nom nom13



Figure 3) Perils of Modernity, JK..... 14



Figure 4) Conceptual Meme..... 15



Figure 5) 2011 A Space Odyssey..... 17



Figure 6) 01_Brines_ThrowingMyselfIntoThings_0045... 19



Figure 7) Show Card..... 20



Chapter 1: A Rapid Culture Shift

“The value of a particular artists after Duchamp can be weighed according to how much they questioned the nature of Art” - Joseph Kosuth

Photography is an accessible media; it has been so nearly since its creation. In the current culture of digital living this is only increasing. Despite its wide availability to the general public, photography has carved itself a stronghold within the realm of Fine Art. This is not a recent occurrence but one that has previously been established, and remains in constant discussion by photography's relation to mass availability. There are many iterations of this that have occurred throughout history, whether it was the dry plate process, the Brownie, the Polaroid, the digital camera, or computers and the internet's allowance of access to programs that facilitate more photographic interaction. These iterations have pushed the medium into a more accessible place within culture. There are many options for both photographic input and output. Flickr, various blogs, myspace, YouTube, and facebook are all examples of contemporary culture's current critical mass becoming a fully entrenched digital image culture. This is relevant because it is also shaping the way we view these images. When our perception of these images begins to change, so too does our view of the world. The majority of images are available nearly instantly, but are now viewed through more mediated layers.

Images are now presented after more translations than ever before. The mediation gap between originator and viewer is the largest it has ever been. A camera set to an automatic mode captures an image based on a human's directional input

(framing). Upon inspection that the image contains enough representation of the original document, the image is then uploaded directly to an internet location. That is a most simplistic input process, but still illustrates the multiple translations that can occur on the input side. This information is now presented as an open source document to be viewed immediately. The majority of images that we now encounter are dictated through a computer algorithm. One can generally access a wide variety of images very quickly. For example, a Google image search for "Mona Lisa" just returned over 2 million results in .59 seconds. The variety of these images is huge, and without having seen the original it can be very difficult to determine which are the simulacra and which are real.

The simulacrum, a concept brought to mass culture through Baudrillard's "Simulacra and Simulation," has become more and more applicable as time passes. He describes a society in which a false reality is created and eventually takes the place of the original experience:

"Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map." (Baudrillard 1988).

There are already realizations of this, such as Zizek's acknowledgement that our minds consistently create a false reality for ourselves so that we may remove any unpleasant or culturally unpopular ideas from of present consciousness (Zizek 2005). But this does not address the literal hypereality that our culture is creating. There are many easy scapegoats that have been recently addressed, such as video games and movies; the difference is that we now have many hypereality cultural shifts that have permeated much further than just intended false reality releases. The Internet is a prime example of this, but even news media has changed much of their delivery format to cope with this shift, giving more breadth and less depth and employing more sensational narratives out of a necessity to attract viewers. There has never been a cultural shift this rapid, there has never before been this much information as quickly and widely available. The way humans input information and therefore interact is drastically changing. All previously established canons of culture must manage this shift to stay relevant.

Chapter 2: Fine Art:Artist:Viewer

Fine Art was once reserved for the aristocracy. Enjoying art required leisure time, and generally larger than average amounts of money. The rich could afford the free time that the working class could not. This free time could lead to more studies and a better understanding of Fine Art. Without this extra time one could not be expected to have the ability to understand the significance of Fine Art. Through institutionalizing its power over the viewer, Fine Art is able to control both the viewer and the art/artist. Fine Art sustains the premise that the artist creates from within but transcends to the Universal moment accessible to an audience. Fine Art also sustains the practice that the artist creates autonomously within his/her own studio and the gallery must in turn act as a medium/clairvoyant for the viewer. All of this has been, and is continually a part of Fine Art's need to self-propagate

Do not touch the artwork; the white walls are there for a reason. If one does not understand a piece, it is not the piece that does not speak; it is the viewer who is deaf (uneducated). Emotions and beauty are a universal that an artist can access to a greater degree than a layperson. These are some of the unwritten rules that culture naturalizes about Fine Art. These rules place the viewer at an immediate disadvantage when encountering work. My work questions the structure of Fine Art and the pedestals that it stands upon.

What I am most concerned with is the interaction that occurs between the viewer and the piece of art. The viewer must have some sort of a response to the piece presented to them. If there is no response then the piece can well be considered a

failure (this being a Universalist but personal variation within the Fine Art ideology). Dislike towards my work is just as valid a response as excitement is. When the viewer reacts, the door for further action is opened. Even if the reaction is to oppose the concept, then success is achieved by establishing a dialogue. My intent is to create viewer interaction and establish a dialogue.

Literal interaction is generally the quickest avenue to creating a viewer's response. I find there is a general apathy towards concept from the viewer and by forcing the viewer to interact with a piece I can begin to break that apathy. Anticipating the viewer's stance through use of highly visible cultural artifacts allows me to better manipulate the viewer. Popular culture is not only accessible to a majority, but it is generally polarizing as well. This type of content provides quick entry points to hopefully introduce the viewer to the concept.

In issues regarding the concept, Art tends to alienate the viewer, yet needs them present to do so. Fine Art claims cultural independence; however it is culturally dependent. It is through this self-propagating hierarchical establishment that Fine Art retains its importance but repels the viewer. Fine Art necessitates reverence of its activities but must somehow convey this to the viewer. This is often achieved by keeping the viewer at a distance, creating both enchantment and repulsion (a form of the sublime). My primary focus is towards increasing the awareness of the viewers, encouraging them to investigate and question their surroundings further. My creations must therefore allow entry into a greater understanding of a subject. Allowing my viewer an entrance without Fine Art's pretenses is one way of navigating that moment.

It is important that the viewers recognize that they are interacting with the piece, understanding their complacency (and compliance) in the manipulation that occurred. Diderot's idea of the "fourth wall" in theater parallels the passive nature of the audience that also occurs in the gallery. With this "wall" being an inherent part, only the actor or artist can break through it without repercussion (an audience member would be scolded for shouting out without invitation to do so).

Without this realization the viewer cannot be credibly asked for any further participation in creating culture, they are only reacting and following. This moment of self-actualization through interaction should lend itself to a further understanding of the viewer's positioning within culture. If they can understand their own manipulation on a simulated cultural construct (the Gallery) then the transference of understanding to mass culture should be easy and immediate. The viewer should come to understand that they are influencing the space of the gallery and so should not act as a passive member of the gallery. Complementary, they are an active participant in the creation of culture (the exact reason for being unable to be passive in the gallery) and should be aware that it is an impossible stance to act as though they have no role in it. The Gallery then becomes A microcosm of reality, a small tear in Baudrillard's map.

One of the many difficulties with providing a tear in the map is that it is most effective if done in real time, but also most difficult to do so. Attempting to understand what is in the present is very difficult; much more difficult than understanding what has been. It is much easier to look backwards for answers than it is to observe them in the present. Awareness of the present is difficult and is why it is avoided by most. Presenting awareness of current issues is difficult in that they must be realized and

represented in a quick manner. Realizing the present is most difficult because lacks the secondary context that a past event has. Events from the past can be judged against both preceding and post contexts. Contemporary events can be judged against the past, but only the hypothetical can be used for future references. To compound things even further, skepticism of the present makes representation of it difficult as well. “The internet is just a fad” is a statement that could have found a base twenty years ago. Our culture is shifting at a faster rate than ever before because of the huge volumes of information now available; not even the industrial age compares to how rapid contemporary culture is changing.

The rapid pace with which the new is being presented leads to the skepticism and hesitance of the viewer. This is true both within Fine Art and general culture. The new creates anxiety until mastered. Once mastered, more possibilities are opened, and with this more understanding comes more questions, thus leading to more anxiety of unknowns. This cycle presents two problems to the artist. One is that in an attempt to present something new to the viewer, introduction of anxiety is unavoidable. The artist will naturally strive to present the new as Fine Art; this has position and is celebrated as the Avante Garde, the highest form of creation. The second problem is the heightened anxiety that results after mastering this new presentation. There is no incentive to master in a newly presented situation, thereby making the viewer willfully ignorant.

To counteract this willful disregard, the artist must create with a point of entry in their work that entices the viewer. Aesthetics are the most common tool used to provide entrance to a piece. Traditional aesthetics adheres to the traditional Fine Art moment. I find that the use of anti or non-aesthetics gives the same access through anticipation of

the context (gallery setting) and uses its juxtaposition of traditional ideals as an entry point. These entry points are set up to polarize anticipation of the viewer into two sets: informed viewer and layperson.

Chapter 3: Who Encounters Art

The informed viewer most likely is already aware of the baggage that Fine Art carries with it. This baggage being the actual ideological status that informed viewers are more aware of; by being not feeling the ideas as natural they are no longer ideological, they can then become a more colloquial term such as baggage. Without patrons Fine Art cannot exist and so with very little effort one can conclude that much of the art that is produced is done so only for informed viewers. The informed viewer is aware of the artist's anticipation of their presence and their personal baggage that comes with them. The informed viewer has a certain degree of familiarity with the Fine Art model and historical trends. This knowledge gives context to any information that the artist might be providing with the piece. The essence of the informed viewer is that they are more aware; they understand they are participating, they understand the context of the creation, and with this awareness should be able to make an interpretation based on the given piece.

It is assumed that the layperson is one who does not have the professional knowledge of Fine Art. They are unassuming towards predispositions in art but are still fully influenced by them. They will have some information of Fine Art (even to assume "tabula rasa" of the viewer, they would be informed by the gallery unconsciously upon entry) that dictates their interaction with the creations. Their awareness of this is what, at the most basic level, separates them from the informed viewer. Once awareness of their position is gained, their context in the setting is cemented and any further knowledge gained is more easily achieved. The tools to further the layperson's knowledge of art can be enhanced through awareness of self,

although the difficulty presented by willful apathy that stems from unease of the unknown must be overcome. Traditionally aesthetics have become a main, if not poor, solution.

My intent is to create work that is informative to both viewers, establishing a constant awareness that informs both viewers of one another's presence. By becoming aware of one another, a shift can occur towards self-evaluation and away from the current label (potentially layperson to informed viewer, or vice versa). All of this is to be performed in the presence of self-aware art pieces, that is art that reveals itself as a creation rooted in culture. This should further the awareness of the viewer towards a more informed conscious state; one that is more able to cope with our mediated reality through assessment of it. The artist can attempt to evaluate and reveal as a service to the viewer, but must understand the origins of cultural context. As our current state is so rapidly shifting, it is most important for the artist to give the viewer the tool of evaluation so they can build from that.

Chapter 4: The Work

My thesis work consists of still photographs, installation, and animated .gif files. Each of these items is intended to reflect on what has been previously discussed, through both content and presentation. Simply put, the objects are intended to reveal themselves as ideologically driven signifiers. This revelation is intended to facilitate awareness in the viewer.

The photographs begin with mundane recognizable content. The scale at which they are presented provides a tantalizing aesthetic, one rooted in the viewer's relation to advertising scale. This provides a quick moment of comfort, interest, and acceptance from the viewer. Now that the viewer is participant more details should be apparent. The images are not framed, but instead presented in a mounted wall protrusion. This presentation is lacking the formal stalwart of framed objects in the gallery, but still retains the slickness of Modern Art presentations. The images themselves are notably of less quality than is expected of a Fine Art print. However, this lack of image quality should not be limiting factor of interest for the viewer. This "cell phone" aesthetic should be quite acceptable in that it is already well permeated and ingrained in our collective cultural conscious. The formal construction of the image content is self-aware in its presentation. Objects are overly emphasized in their blatant irregular placement. Unlike the entirety of the show, the photographs can be taken "pars pro toto," as each element speaks directly to the conceptual moment.



Figure 1

The work, entitled *Psychostrategies Of Avante-garde Art, lolz* (Figure 1), is one of five prints in the room of hanging photographs. The image content is simple and mundane, easily recognizable objects arranged simply in the space. The styling of the mustard is aesthetic and interesting. In contrast, there is a confusing depth to the picture and an unnatural color shift that is particularly strong in the top of the image.

The placement of the foot is also suggestive of something more than a quick snapshot, it is at an irregular angle for this to be the photographer's foot yet seems very deliberate.



Figure 2

Mechanical Reproduction, nom nom nom (Figure 2) continues in the same presentation as the other images. There is a simple, yet deliberate arrangement of objects in space, odd color shifts, and pixilation begins occurring with size at which they are presented.

Next in the room is *Perils of Modernity, JK* (Figure 3). The content of this photograph is different, but conceptually it is the same. Likewise the title in every piece blends a very cultured moment with a high art intellectual moment, mimicking the visual juxtaposition that is already at hand.



Figure 3

After seeing most of the images in the show, most viewers have noticed the continual placement of a foot in the images. This is both a humorous element and a specific suggestion that the creator was very intentional in the creation process. *Conceptual Meme* (Figure 4), like the others, continues to reinforce the same dialogue with the aesthetics that are presented.



Figure 4

Finally, on a wall to itself, sits *A Space Odyssey, 2011* (Figure 5). This image is different from the others in that the content is not as similar. The image depicts a smashed cultural icon, which at first read is hard to recognize because it is rarely presented in a non-pristine state. Ironically the iPhone being presented is the very camera that made all of the other images on display in the room, and all of the images for the videos in the room opposite. The image is actually a scan of the device, but much like the degraded quality of the cell phone aesthetic the scan can be seen to be riddled with scratches, smudges, and dust. Much like the object itself the photograph is in a state of limbo between museum quality, and everyday object. The large black obelisk looms interesting with its cracks, but is not presented with its typical high cultural status.

In the room opposite, the projections follow a trend of ever increasing digital media presented in galleries; the format that they are presenting is quite commonplace. The projectors are looping animated .gif files, a mid-1990's file format that has remained relevant through animations on the internet. These animations are still frames presented in rapid succession, a very similar aesthetic to stop motion video. There is cultural commodity and ease of approach intermingling with the standards for Fine Art. The lights in the video room that would normally be trained on the images themselves will this time be highlighting the projectors. This retains the comfort of highlighting artwork within a gallery, but instead questions what is most important: the image, the machine, or just the idea of itself?

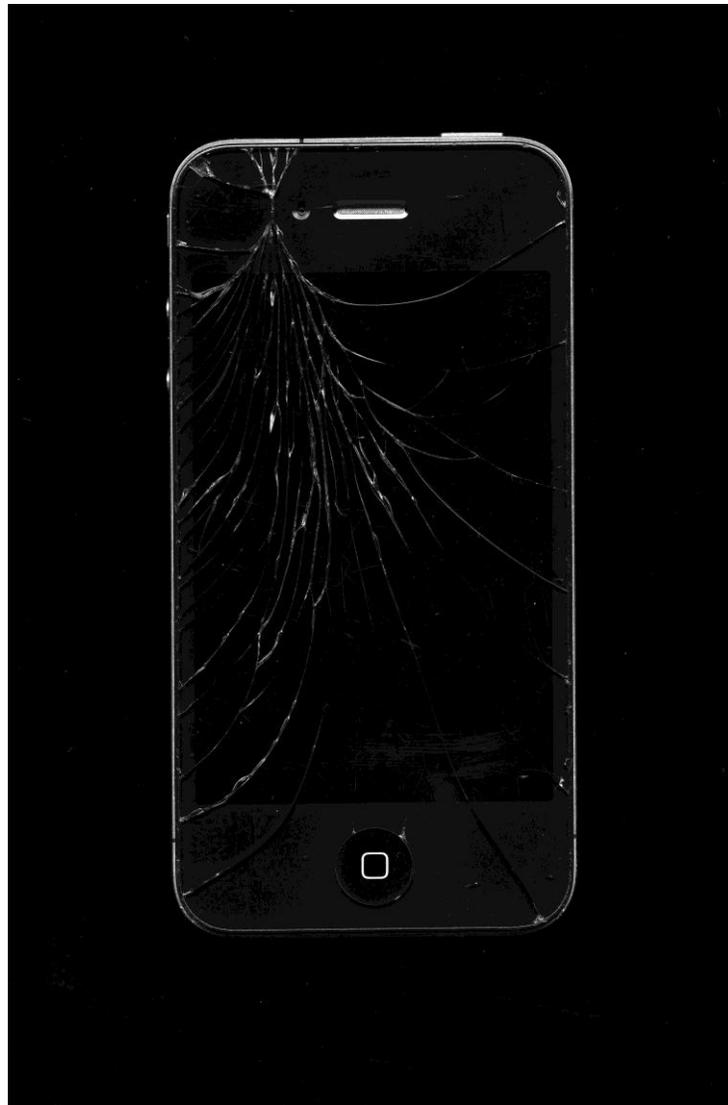


Figure 5

The first part of the exhibition space is in the main hallways, and is the first portion of the show that the viewer will encounter. When they encounter this portion they are faced with a decision. Velvet roped stanchions dictate that they are able to enter one of two rooms. Each room is labeled in a polarizing manner to the other room. Aesthetically the presentation of the signage falls in line with the work in the two galleries. LED signs will broadcast these words, straddling the line between the comfortable modern advertising moment and acceptance of what can be found in a Fine

Art Museum. The terms presented (listed together as they would oppose):
Informed/Uninformed, Traditional/Dated, Educated/Uneducated, Bold/Boring,
Ordained/Layperson, Gallery/Home, Professional/Amateur, International/Regional,
Beautiful/Common, Orchestrator/Participant, Craft/Commodity, Creator/Viewer, Avant-
Garde/Status Quo, Concept/Aesthetic, Elite/Bourgeoisie, Museum/Public,
Creative/Boring, High/Low, Speaker/Audience, Art/Artifacts, Priest/Congregation, Fine
Art/Objects, Rebirth/Darkness, Masterpiece/Craft, Natural/Ideology, Formal/Informal,
Transcendent/Mundane, Vogue/Kitsch, Artist/Recipient, Expression/Repression,
Self/Other. These terms will be displayed simultaneously above opposite rooms. One
room houses the photographs; the other contains the “video.” The viewer is implicated
to decide on what label he or she will choose for his or herself, thereby making
conscious an ideological stance (a cultural idea felt as though natural) that they had
already felt when entering the Museum. This is the starting point for all of the other
revelations discussed, that the work facilitates access to. I am anticipating the viewer’s
baggage within the establishment to allow them to see the parameters under which they
have entered the museum.

Behind the velvet roped stations is one final image.

01_Brines_ThrowingMyselfIntoThings_0045 hangs in the open space beyond the
barrier. It is a humorous image that hangs along a hallway that is receding from the
viewer, never allowing a comfortable perpendicular view that is normally afforded the
viewer. The photograph is humorous but inaccessible, lowbrow art that is still kept
beyond the viewer’s access. The title alludes to it just being any other digital file, less
important than its Cartier-Bresson like “decisive moment” of capture.



Figure 6

Finally, the show card was design to begin this delineation before the viewer entered the museum. Viewers are given access to two possible show titles, each following the parameters previously discussed. Before arriving at the show viewers have become participants by actively analyzing two very different and polarizing show titles. Another aspect of the card design is its relation to contemporary internet culture. Its design style is directly related to the lolcats made popular by icanhazcheezburger.com. Presented in this manner the viewer can easily approach it as a mainstream cultural artifact, but one that contains Fine Art concepts.



Figure 7

Chapter 5: The Conclusion

All facets of the installation attempt to create dialogue towards revealing the ideologies of the viewer. Although the content does attempt to reinforce it, the content is irrelevant. It is the ideologies of the viewer that dictate the experience. My creations can at best reveal those ideologies and at least the work can attempt to anticipate the viewer's cultural baggage. In a world that is becoming increasingly lived in simulacra, the work strives to reveal the structure of that creation. By understanding the way in which one understands, one can begin to understand the stimulus.

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