

FOOD BODY PLACE

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Abstract

My work aims to question how historic tropes shape the way personal identity is formed in relation to sexuality, specifically in relation to masculinity and queerness. By using the symbols which are representative of my cultural background, I aim to find ways in which the inherent sexuality in these symbols can be brought forward – a queering of the iconography I am surrounded by.

A Butlerian understanding of sexuality tells us that gender is on a spectrum – the polarities of masculine and feminine are archetypes that no one actually inhabits and are perpetuated by the media. Through art making I aim to break down these archetypes of gender and sexuality that are enforced in subtle and nuanced ways.

This essay investigates ways in which form and line can corrode the propaganda that is enforced by western media concerning gender archetypes. In my current artistic practice I have chosen to mostly focus on my childhood upbringing as a model to express how gender is enforced through the iconography I am surrounded by. I grew up in a factory town, a town where everyone's lives revolved around working for one company: McCain Foods. I have chosen to use this company to represent my childhood experience but also to reflect on the history of the place I came from.

Munoz's ideas of disidentification and Ahmed's theorizing of disorientation are tools that have allowed me to explore personal cultural iconography rooted in the local of the Maritimes, which can be exclusive. Through contortion of form and by emphasizing sexual connotations I create a queering of the local industries of my own family history. Food has given me a vessel for commentary on my personal experience concerning sexuality, and I look forward to creating new works that deal with these themes.

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Introduction

I am invested in questioning heteronormativity and to consider how my role as a maker might intervene within media constructs – exploring gender roles and masculinity specifically. My initial concern drew me to a study of the male form, how archetypes are created and enforced through mass media, and what this means towards issues of gender expressivity. My current work studies where place and identity intersect, using food labels as a vessel for commentary, reflecting on the past to reveal a personal narrative and to create new cultural meanings. In my paintings the sexual connotations of the still life, breakdown of form, and physical presence of the body within the brushwork ultimately represent a queering of dominant cultural representations.

Food, body, and place are three themes that I investigate in my practice. Currently I am researching the relation of food icons to place: how do historic tropes shape the way personal identity is formed in relation to sexuality and how can this be exposed through image making?

The Maritimes

I am from what is known as The Maritime Provinces or “The Maritimes;” Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. These are Canada’s smallest provinces in terms of population, size, and wealth¹. The Maritimes are located in southeastern Canada on the Atlantic Coast. These three provinces, along with Newfoundland, make up Atlantic Canada.

In my adolescence I was a fussy eater, I did not like potatoes, but I did like French fries. My mom said she had never met a Carlton-County boy who didn't like potatoes.

Another food I did not like was fish, which is almost unfathomable for someone coming from the east coast, a place where fishing is so tightly ingrained into the culture. By being a fussy eater you are constantly reminded of idioms such as how certain foods make you “big and strong” or “put hair on your chest” – here I had to negotiate gender expectation with the food I ate. To be a “meat and potatoes kind of guy”² means that the “guy” in question is considered normal, typical or average – adhering to standards of masculinity. Another reading of this idiom is that the person is conservative or simple and the phrase can be used to describe men living in rural areas. This idiom can also be used to describe someone who is narrow minded or stubborn – someone who is unwilling to experiment, is closed minded and is disinclined to try new things. Common phrases exemplify the ways in which we enforce gender norms through foods. My practice rejects the standard representations of food logos, which embody sexuality.

Creating Gender Trouble

In Judith Butler’s book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler theorizes gender as something that is constantly reenacted. The central idea is that gender is constructed through a performance. The accumulation of these reenactments produces what society has considered being one’s “true gender” (Butler 174). The performance of gender that Butler describes is not necessarily intentional but arises in many forms whether verbal or nonverbal (Butler 177). Butler’s theory questions gender as stable and confined to the polarities of masculine and feminine. Performativity is a styled repetition of acts (Butler 43), which conform to the ideals of gender polarities.

² "Meat-and-potatoes Definition and Synonyms | Macmillan Dictionary." *Meat-and-potatoes Definition and Synonyms | Macmillan Dictionary*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.

Butler shows that gender polarities are constructed and perpetuated by mass media. Since gender is an impersonation of a norm that has been collectively created, no one actually inhabits this norm or ideal (Butler 23).

If gender is a performance, what happens when that stage changes? My practice aims to understand what happens to masculinity or maleness as I change locations within the world. What does the movement from one place to another mean in terms of sexuality and gender? Through answering these questions I knew that I had to create “gender trouble,” subverting the expected notions of how gender, specifically masculinity, are perpetuated in the media.

Masculinity is standardized in the Maritimes not only by the food you eat, but how you dress, your mannerisms and behavior. More traditional roles are held within this rural area; men being the provider and women the caregiver. Blue-collar workers such as fisherman, laborers, and miners hold the archetype of masculinity on the east coast. Being in the arts is inherently anti-masculine by east coast definition.

Orientation and the Straight Line

In Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, she is concerned with the relationship of the word orientation to the term sexual orientation. If physical orientation is concerned about the relative position of something (or someone) to something else, then sexual orientation can only be defined in accordance to which direction someone’s desire is oriented towards. Her book explores what it means for sexuality to be lived out in accordance to place, how sexuality directs where we live and how where we are in the world affects the expression of our identity.

If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit

spaces as well as “who” or “what” we inhabit spaces with. After all, queer geographers have shown us how spaces are sexualized... If we foreground the concept of “orientation,” then we can re-theorize this sexualization of space, as well as the spatiality of sexual desire (Ahmed 10).

The icons that we choose to represent place, such as the fish of the Maritimes, are touristic tropes, which include some and not others. In the same way Judith Butler describes performance of gender, the tropes and icons of the Maritimes are a type of performance of place that enforces normativity, which is exclusive. To “be straight,” for instance, means that one is following the expected path, while straying outside of these boundaries would be considered abnormal:

In being straight, for example, one’s desire follows a straight line, which is presumed to lead toward the “other sex,” as if that is the “point” of the line. The queer orientation might not simply be directed toward the “same sex,” but would be seen as not following the straight line (Ahmed 176).

Sara Ahmed discusses line in a topographic sense; however this theory of line can be applied to mark-making as well. An aberration from this norm would be deviating from the straight line, or the expected contours of the subject. I first discovered this during my independent study period, as I began making experiments of blind contour drawings of myself.

Fracturing of Form

One Line Blind Contour Study, 2015, is a series of 75 drawings of semi-nude selfies. “The Selfie” as defined by critical theorist Brooke Wendt, is “a type of digital self-portrait taken with a mobile phone and characterized by its ubiquity,” (Wendt 7) in her article *The Allure of the Selfie*. In *One Line Blind Contour Study*, the degradation of figure is a type of queering of the male body. The literal fracturing of line represents a

distancing from the sense of boundedness and separation, which empowers male standards, which western media enforces. In the drawings the hard edges of the body become softened, the contours and boundaries of the body become distorted - this allows the male form to be placed within a context of openness and variability.



Fig. 1: Peter Bleumortier, *One Line Blind Contour Study*, 2015, Oil Marker and Watercolour on paper, 22x22, 1/75. Used by permission of the artist.

In Richard Dyer's *White*, he discusses the meaning of the muscular Adonis-type male form, which is perpetuated as an ideal within western media:

“Looking like a statue again invokes the classical; men against the horizon are a cliché of aspirational propaganda. Moreover, a hard contoured body does not look like it runs the risk of being merged into other bodies. A sense of separation and boundedness is important to the white male ego” (Dyer 216).

It is important to note that Dyer associates the “white male ego” with the heterosexual white male (Dyer 34). In my work, the technique of contouring a male body without looking at the page allows the shape of the body to adopt new forms. The looseness of the contour threatens the male archetype, or the “statuesque aspirational

propaganda” which Dyer discusses. This drawing reflects the attempt to adhere to the idealized, muscular male form but also a refusal to accept it.

Food and Paint

The relationship between paint and food can be both literal and metaphorical. The language of painting has given me a vessel to express my embodied experience. The ways in which paint can be applied to the canvas has become a way for me to express my personal disposition. Paint becomes the object itself and I invite the viewer to consume or digest the image, perhaps not literally but as a form of contemplation. Here the idiom “you are what you eat” fits well within my practice.

By making paint look like food I am trying to engender a sense of hunger in the viewer. This is done through heavy, textural paint applications and impasto techniques. Here the paint becomes the frosting of a chocolate cake or the slick oily sheen of a sardine. Hunger is an embodied reaction, desire or lust being embodied reactions as well.

Linda Williams discusses the relationship of the image to the body in her article *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess*, with fear, lust and humor being the principle embodied reactions within cinema (Williams 3). I would argue that in my work hunger also plays a role in the body genres. This yearning, the space where desire and hunger overlap, is what I want to evoke in the work. Hunger is a feeling of discomfort or unease, a yearning for food. Desire is a strong feeling of want and lust is a sexual desire.



Fig. 2: Peter Bleumortier, *Brunswick Sardines in Spring Water*, 2015, 48x60 inches, Oil on Canvas. Used by permission of the artist.



Fig. 3: Peter Bleumortier, *Mr. Donair The Original Donair Sauce*, 2015, 48x60, Oil on Canvas. Used by permission of the artist.



Fig. 4: Peter Bleumortier, *McCain Deep 'N Delicious*, 2015, 48x60 inches, Oil on Canvas. Used by permission of the artist.

The foods which I have chosen to paint are representative of the Maritimes. The embodied hunger represents nostalgia and a yearning to fit in. The vintage sardine can represents my ancestry³ and a maritime tradition that is becoming less and less common. The cake represents my childhood and current climate of maritime food culture. The bottle of donair sauce is a food unique to the Maritimes - it is sweet sauce to put on shawarmas, pizzas and sandwiches. Donair sauce represents a hybridity of cultural influences, including Greek, Middle Eastern⁴ and Canadian.

All three images are painted against a white background with the outer edges of the object contoured in black. The images are painted in a flat graphic style, large in scale, with bright colours – referential to the Pop-Art movement of the 1950s. The erotic implication in each painting becomes more apparent when the images are placed alongside each other. The bottle of donair sauce, already gendered by its logo, reads: “Mr. Donair, The Original – L’Original, Donair Sauce.” The donair sauce, being the most suggestive of the three images, ejaculates toward the chocolate cake. The text on the cake, which reads: “Deep n’ Delicious,” is now charged with double meaning.

The peeling back of the sardine can represents the exposing of flesh. By revealing the tightly packed fish, this signifies a distancing from the flat representation of logo or

³ On my father’s side of the family there is a long history of smoking sardines and herring. My dad is from a small island just south of New Brunswick called Grand Manan. Until recently, his family owned a fishery there – three modest fishing huts, including a smokehouse. These huts or “stands” are in Seal Cove, New Brunswick and were built and first inhabited by my great-great grandfather in the early 1900s and stayed in my family for four generations. Since my grandparents’ passing in 1995, The Seal Cove Smoked Herring Stands have become national historic sites of Canada. The sardines and herring were boxed and sold to the Brunswick fishing company to later be canned.

⁴ Similar to the Greek “gyro” pita or Middle Eastern shawarma, donair sauce was said to be invented by Leo Gamoulakos in Halifax after he failed to sell the tradition gyro on the east coast. “Best Donair.” *The Coast Halifax*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2016.

signage, into a conversation concerning the body, through the simple gesture of opening a can. I would argue that even without contextualization the sexual connotations are still present in the work. Without contextualization however, the sexual meaning is hidden or hiding in plain sight. This hiding in plain sight is similar to my experience with my sexuality growing up; your sexuality is embodied within you however you must perform archetypical gender roles in order to fit in.

The French Fry Capital

When I was born the doctor exclaimed, “He’s a hockey player!” This was in a hospital just outside of Florenceville, New Brunswick - a small town with a population of just over 1500 people. ⁵Originally Florenceville was named Buttermilk Creek; a precious valley of land adorned with the name of a rich and indulgent food. Florenceville was named after Florence Nightingale ⁶who was a nurse during WWI, a political reformer and most importantly a non-normative female figure for her time and place.

Florenceville is best known as home to the McCain headquarters, which is one of the largest food processing companies in Canada. Here my father worked indirectly for the McCains, dealing with their accounts as a manager at the local Scotiabank. When I was younger I understood the McCain family as two boys, around my age, that lived down the street - not a powerful international brand. I did not see the McCains as one of the wealthiest families in Canada until I grew older. As I became more aware of the world around me so too did I become more aware of the global presence this family had.

⁵ "Florenceville - Village, New Brunswick, Canada." *Population, Age Characteristics, Dwellings, Houses, Language, Education, Work, Industry, Earnings, Income, Immigration, Citizenship, Labor*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2016.

⁶ Florenceville-Bristol - History." *Florenceville-Bristol - History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2016.

McCain Foods, such as in the painting, *McCain Deep n' Delicious 2015*, provide a direct connection with my lived experience in the Maritimes. This company may not be what first comes to mind when people from outside the Maritimes think of the east coast – however, if you're a local, then it is easy to associate these foods with the comforts of childhood.

McCain Foods is the largest producer of french fries in the world, as Florenceville claims the title the French Fry Capital⁷ and even boasts a potato museum. This town is symbolized by the McCain logo. Florenceville has a tight knit community; however, people were professionals from across the country, usually only staying for a decade or so to work for the McCains. It's difficult, if not impossible, to remain anonymous in such a tight knit community – most gossip was exchanged at the hockey rink over a Tim Horton's coffee.

Just beyond our backyard was the McCain potato field. It was convenient for my family to have access to such a large amount of farmland as whenever we needed potatoes for supper we just walked past our property and stole some from the McCains. The disadvantage to having McCain farmland in our backyard was that it was sprayed with pesticides twice a year. This resulted in the death of my cat when I was five, and has given me a continued struggle with my own respiratory issues. Ironically, this meant I was not able to play hockey, as the cold air and physical exertion would trigger my asthma - this usually resulted in me becoming sick on the ice. At age five, I had already failed to embody my doctor's prescribed gender norms. At this age I knew I did not want to be a hockey player but wanted to be an artist. However this was in a town where the

⁷ "Florenceville-Bristol - Home." *Florenceville-Bristol - Home*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.

only jobs available were ones at the McCain factory. I soon realized I had to look beyond the place I was from to find others who also deviate from the norm.



Fig. 5: Peter Bleumortier, *McCain Smiles, Regular* 2016, 48x60 inches, Oil on Canvas. Used by permission of the artist.

The houses on my street were large and were on vast properties with manicured lawns. Keeping up with appearances was important in Florenceville, and at home, dinner conversation was meant to be light and to avoid anything serious such as politics or sexuality. This type of pre-packaged happiness, ignoring one's internal disposition, is what inspired me to create the painting *McCain Smiles, Regular* 2016, which depicts an abstracted version of a bag of McCain frozen smile fries, slightly crumpled or distorted.

The palette of the painting is warm and features the text reading (from top to bottom) "McCain – Smiles – Regular – 0 Trans Fat." Behind the McCain logo are trees with a black bird flying east; dotting the "i" of the McCain logo. Perhaps not entirely clear to the viewer is the background of the bag of fries - this shows the abstracted

“smiley fries” themselves. Due to the crumpling of the bag and dripping of the paint it is hard to tell whether the faces are smiling or crying. This represents the sort of façade one must put on in order to interact with society, as many people do, especially in Florenceville. How one can be happy on the outside but unhappy on the inside - forced to put on a happy face in front of the neighbours while their temperament is questionable. This type of engrained performance connects to Butler’s theories of performativity. Further relating to Butler theory is the idea that the smiley fry is genderless or at least on a spectrum between the binaries of male and female - this allows the smile fry to represent a broader range of people.

Disidentification

In José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politic*, he sympathizes with the struggles minorities face when placed within the conditions of today’s society. He uses queer men as an example as a minority subject for disidentification which is a method that can be used by any smaller group working against a larger body. Muñoz points to disidentification as a transformative tool, which allows the individual to mediate their experience of having crossed identifications. For Muñoz, disidentification “is a mode of recycling or re-forming an object that has already been invested with powerful energy. It is important to emphasize the transformative restructuration of that disidentification” (Muñoz 39). Disidentification is a way to remodel or reconstruct the objects and symbols of the dominant cultural ideology by a member of a minority group. One must first break down the dominant cultural symbols but also build it back together to create a new form. As in *One Line Blind Contour Study*

2015, I have chosen to remodel the aspirational statuesque propaganda of the male form as enforced by western media and then break it apart to create something new.

Disidentification is a means of negotiating the cultural symbols, which are chosen to represent a large group of people but fail to include the diverse nuances that make us unique within a group system. It is a way of working within a system as a means to create change – using the everyday symbols at one’s disposal as a tool to voice the non-normative experience of those minorities within a prescribed cultural narrative. It is not a way of completely rejecting the dominant cultural forces at hand but rather manipulating them in order to represent new perspectives within an exclusionary system. In my blind contour drawings, for example, failing to adhere to the straight line, or expected contours of the body symbolized my rejection of male archetypes and deviation from what it means to follow a straight path or to “be straight” concerning sexuality.

Heroic Iconography

Muñoz uses Jean-Michel Basquiat as an example for disidentification. Muñoz speculates how an impoverished black artist from Brooklyn rose to the high ranks of art stardom (Muñoz 48). In his paintings, Basquiat aligned himself with his heroes: Batman, The Flash, black athletes and political figures. It is important to note that these figures are emblematic of masculine representation through powerful figures and muscular forms. Masculinity can also be seen in Basquiat’s brushwork: bold, violent strokes and aggressive application of medium.

By using the “powerful energy (Munoz 39)” that has been invested in these masculine individuals, Basquiat was able to insert himself into a dialogue with those he considered iconic. By being in conversation with these powerful figures, Basquiat, in

turn, elevated himself to their status. His work raises the lowbrow realm of comic books while simultaneously negotiating the highbrow status of fine art. Basquiat's aesthetic was his way of remodeling or reconstructing the slick, sharp, pop-art style at the time – which in turn remodeled what it means to be a powerful male figure.

Basquiat's painting *Per Capita*, 1981, depicts a man in black paint, wearing boxing shorts just left of the center of the image. The man can be assumed to be Joe Louis, by similar characteristics in Basquiat's other works such as *Joe Louis Surrounded by Snakes*, 1982. Louis' shorts read "EVERLAST," and are white, with a black and red circular motif. Everlast is a brand but can also have a double meaning, perhaps discussing concepts of longevity or permanence. A halo appears above Louis' head and he is holding a torch. On the left of the image is text of the American states in alphabetical order, which can be determined as the states per capita incomes⁸; looking at the figures there is immediately a sense of inequity.

The text "E PLURIBUS" reads above the Boxer's halo. This is a fragment of the phrase "E Pluribus Unum" meaning "One from" in Latin. E pluribus, simply meaning "one from," a fragment of the phrase, is open to interpretation. Contextualizing the text above the painting of the Joe Louis, implies that the boxer is rich and many others are poor, or that the boxer is one of many black men used as a means for others to achieve higher status. My "hero" is a not person but a place: the Maritimes. I have chosen to align myself with the symbols, which represent this place but aim to create new perspectives.

⁸ Hoffman, Fred. "The Defining Years: Notes on Five Key Works." *Artist-essay*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2016.



Fig. 6: Elmgreen and Dragset, *Powerless Structures Fig. 101*, bronze statue. Photographed March 2012 by Gary Knight (licensed under terms cc-by-sa-2.0)

Scandinavian artist duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, in their work entitled *Powerless Structures*, confront what it means to be a hero of place. The work is a larger-than-life bronze statue of a young boy on a rocking horse; his left hand clutching the handle of the rocking horse while his right hand is waved triumphantly in the air. This piece was displayed in London's Trafalgar Square in 2012 and is referential to the history of commemorating those heroes of war. Because the statue is of a boy on a toy horse and not a man on a real horse this destabilizes the heroic iconography of the equestrian statue monument. The boy is elevated to the status of a hero yet he has no history to commemorate, only a future to hope for⁹. The title *Powerless Structures Fig 101* evokes this notion, as the power of the hero is stripped away from the war-hero.

⁹ "Powerless Structures, Fig.101 by Elmgreen & Dragset." *Elmgreen & Dragset*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2016.
https://www.seditionart.com/elmgreen_and_dragset/powerless_structures_fig_101

As I grew older, it became increasingly difficult to live in such a rural environment. Small towns can be supportive, but also oppressive – gossip provides entertainment and everyone knows your business. This proved to be difficult as an adolescent dealing with issues of identity and sexuality. Munoz points to the difficulty queer adolescents must face in the beginning of his book:

These identifications with other are often mediated by a complicated network of incomplete, mediated, or crossed identifications. They are also forged by the pressures of everyday life, forces that shape a subject and call for different tactical responses. (Muñoz 38)

This type of mediation is something that greatly informs my practice and encourages me to create visual representations of my many overlapping personal identities. The ways in which identity is formed is complex and calls for different representations of self within different spaces. My works aims to crack the surface of representations of self to reveal its inner essence.

Gu Xiong: From Here to There



Fig. 7: Gu Xiong, *Crushed Coca Cola Can*, 2014, Acrylic on Canvas, 40.5 x 62 inches
Used by permission of the artist.

One of the most recognized symbols in the world¹⁰, the Coca-Cola can, is seemingly inanimate and removed from notions of subjectivity. After he moved from Canada to China, Gu Xiong used the Coke can as a vessel to represent his cultural transformation - with some cans showing both English and Chinese text (Gordon Smith Gallery). Specific to Mainland Chinese culture in the 1980s, the Coke can also becomes a symbol of class, as Western products were initially only accessible to those of a certain economic status. Here the can represents desire. The emptiness and repetition of the can speaks of waste and excess.

Gu addresses the circumstances encountered in leaving an old life and creating a new one. Gu once said, “Once a can is crushed it cannot be uncrushed.”¹¹ In relation to Gu’s cultural transformation this means, once you leave a place behind it will never be the same when you go back. Once your perspective is changed, the old model will be perceived differently. The act of crushing an iconic object is a rejection of a standard form and calls for the viewer to embrace a new shape. The place of uncertainty can be difficult to confront but holds the potential of creating meaningful change as to the viewers perception of what symbols can mean.

The crumpling in *McCain Smiles, Regular*, 2016, transforms my relationship to where I am from. It moves away from a straight-forward depiction of the logo, and symbolizes the corrosion of the pre-packaged happiness and romanticism entailed with living in a big house, with a big lawn, in the countryside. This gesture of crushing symbolizes my relationship to place; it is a way of imprinting myself on something I

¹⁰ *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2016.

¹¹ Gu Xiong mentioned this, as an acting external advisor, during my oral thesis defense in the Concourse Gallery at Emily Carr University, April 24, 2016

relate to as iconic. Now the icon has been crushed, a new shape is created, opening a contemplative space concerning how the logo relates to physical force of the body.

Within this space I am able to digest personal experience.

Gu's work focuses on creating hybrids of cultural identity from personal experience;¹² in a similar way Basquiat points to the fragments of cultural identity that make up the individual. Both artists are using symbols that are dominant within the media to convey a message concerning their own cultural transformation. Gu discusses issues of cultural identity as fragments brought together to make up a new individual (Chinese vs. Canadian culture) – Basquiat pieces those fragments together in his work to raise himself to their status (Basquiat vs. Heros). Both artists negotiate differing cultural origins to a dominant system and use tools of disidentification to allow their identity to permeate the forms society has chosen to represent as models for themselves.

The mixture of different histories is what makes us unique. I am interested in how one integrates differing cultural origins with disparate experiences to create symbols true to their experience. In my case, the cultural shift between eastern and western Canada might not be as radical as Gu's travels over the Pacific; however, the straddling of queer identity versus the dominant heteronormative culture is an issue where a minority group is challenging the status quo. Gu's work discusses what happens to cultural identity through migration and location. My work investigates what happens to maleness, masculinity and sexuality as I change locations. What does the movement from one place to another mean in terms of gender and sexuality?

¹² Gu Xiong bio/artist statement "Visual Art Faculty." *Professor, Xiong Gu*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.



Fig. 8: Peter Bleumortier, *McCain Deep 'N Delicious Study*, 2016, 48x60 inches, Oil on Canvas. Used by permission of the artist.

McCain Deep 'N Delicious Study 2016 is a large painting of a chocolate cake that has been physically crushed. The painting also has a flatness or graphic quality. By sectioning the cake into solid shapes of colour this further distorts or abstracts the image itself. The palette of this image is warm, with soft yellows, browns, lilacs, gold and maroon. Texture plays an important role in this work, with thick layers of paint. The brown sections of the painting, which represent the chocolate cake itself, are especially heavily with paint – almost dripping off the canvas.

As in most of my work, the object is against a white background. The dessert is framed with gold tin, yet the frame is fragmented as the cake bursts from its packaging in the bottom right corner. Wrapped around the cake is a crumpled and torn label with a picture of the cake itself on a plate. Above the cake reads “Deep n’ Delicious,” although the text has been obscured. I have signed the painting in the top left corner, PWRB 2016,

which is hidden among the various serial numbers and letters, which appear on the packaging.

Disorientation

My work asks the viewer to become more aware of their own body by creating a sense of disorientation. The represented objects have no sense of ground; they are merely floating in white space. The shattering of the object forces the viewer to question what the cake might have looked like before. To go somewhere they have not been before.

Sara Ahmed in the conclusion of her book points to disorientation as a destabilizing but healthy tool, one where we are constantly negotiating new ground. For the viewer this is a bodily experience that can be destabilizing; perhaps they will reach out and fall or perhaps they will find “new ground to stand on” (Ahmed 164). Looking at my work, one can either accept the depicted object as a deviation from the static logo or an expression of openness and variability. Being queer is not simply a line you can follow (Ahmed 174), but when one deviates from the expected contours of shape it creates a moment where the viewer’s perception of form slips into uncertainty. By applying Ahmed’s concept of disorientation to my work, I ask what will the viewer do with such moments of uncertainty? Will they be seen as oblique deviations from the norm or will they break the ground on which they stand, creating new directions and hope for a world that includes all representations of body, sexuality and cultural representation.

Making Queer

In my work the crushing of the object is a rejection of the way the form *should be* - a rejection to follow the straight line or expected contours - a questioning or queering of our expectation of form, evoking the impossibility of objective representation. The origin of the word “queer” comes from the German “quer” which is to be oblique or perverse¹³. The transforming of the object creates the line as oblique, off-center from the implied line, a slanting of sorts. In my paintings I have intended to bring out the perverse nature, which is inherent in not only food itself but the advertisements and signage as well, which further brings the food into a conversation with the subjective. My practice is a literal *making queer* of the signage, logos and icons, which represent who I am – a subversion of gender archetypes, an act of creating gender trouble.

Disidentification is a kind of performance in its own right, like the performativity of gender Judith Butler mentions. Instead of conforming to gender norms or expectations, disidentification is a tool which aims to create a queer world by working with and against a dominant ideology (Muñoz 25). Throughout the book Muñoz draws attention to the overlapping and fragmented identities and desires that make up each individual. Through my work I am to express variability of identity through manipulation of form- the fragmented identities we are made up of is expressed through the literal fracturing of line as in *One Line Blind Contour Study* or the distortion of form in *McCain Smiles, Regular*.

¹³ *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2016.

Conclusion

In my work I hope to demonstrate the dangers of creating gender norms. Boys do not have to conform to certain body types or eat certain foods just to prove their masculinity or to be a part of a culture. Like the bottle of donair sauce we must embrace hybridity of identity and the amalgamation of different cultures. We must open our eyes to the world around us; travel from space to space, disorient ourselves, acknowledging the diversity that is repressed by cultural emblems.

Through investigation of form and line I have gained insight as to what happens when the contours of the male body are threatened. Disidentification is when a member of a minority group changes the dominant cultural symbols to create something new, expressing variability within the symbols that represent the larger culture they are a part of. It is about managing historical trauma and negotiating systematic repression (Munoz 161). For Basquiat this was his alignment with heros; he was representing those he thought were invested with powerful energy and strategically placed himself among them. As fishing resources become scarce in New Brunswick, McCain Foods became the hero for maritime culture and the economy.

In my practice I will still work with touristic tropes of the places I call home, manipulating their form to create new meaning, perhaps not necessarily where I grew up but the new space in which I have relocated. How does this space impose itself on sexuality? I must shift the foundation from which these symbols stand on. Food has been a tool that has given me many metaphors to draw from – I have a hunger to work with

food culture in my practice but am open to discovering new forms that speak of the body and place.

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