

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: “A Report to an Academy”¹

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What taught me about the ideological aspect of images was getting a BFA and 13 years of working in advertising agencies producing images *attractive, appealing, and reasonable* in order to make visual materials for public communication; for example, a combination of carbonated water, sugar, and some chemicals inside an aluminum can is able to give its consumer “wings.”² I learned this imaginary’s pseudo-theological relationship between a product and its consumer i.e., fetishism, which is maintained within

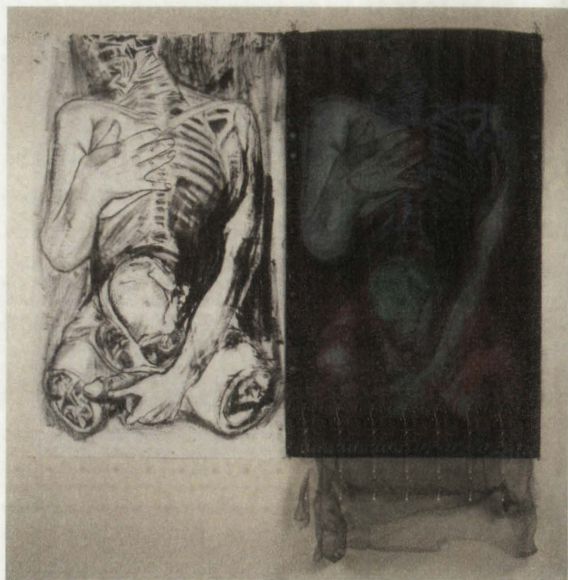


Figure 1. *Family Portrait*, 2016, Mixed printmaking techniques, 50 x 60 in. Photo courtesy of the artist.

a specific framework, as necessary as the framework of a body is to its organs. I started my investigation on this analogy between fetishism and an operational body as if an anatomist during the Enlightenment era dissecting another human’s body to understand humankind. With my sharp knife, or artistic tools, I started disassembling images and reassembling them purposefully.³ For example, when I was commissioned to produce an image of a happy family enjoying a picnic in an idyllic grassy field under the sunshine in an affective way, I cut families out from the final product and replaced them with a family taken from an everyday scene in the war-time Middle East and saved this image for myself (in a folder which I called “counter orders”). The same thing is happening in the piece *Family Portrait* (Figure 1).

In 2015, I was doing some research on the role of printmaking in recording and distributing science during the age of Enlightenment, and I found some prints that were done by Jan van Rymdyk (1730–90) in 1774 in the online archive of the U.S. National Library of Medicine. A set of 26 cold-blooded engravings of female uteruses (some with a dead fetus) they were done in all black and white, perfectly and precisely rendered, and extremely ruthless and soulless; the medium, the style and the subject matter were as cold and sharp as surgeons’ scalpels should be. In my eyes, this quality of extreme professional

detachment (ideologically neutral), as much as that of science, had a sweet dream of what Lacan termed *object of desire*.⁴ Later, I learned that William Hunter (1718-83), who commissioned these prints to Rymsdyk, and his mentor, William Smellie (1697-1763), caused murdering 35 to 40 alive and healthy 9-month pregnant woman to produce these anatomical illustrations.⁵ This is how modern obstetrics has built its "wings."

I would say, this scientific (one might call it ruthless and brutal) approach to a reproductive organ of the human body is not limited only to the sciences but it perhaps also exists even within the family as an institution in which affections and emotions are butchered and manipulated ideologically. A nuclear family in its institutional way is not merely a group of random people living together, but a very specific arrangement has taken place there; someone must play the father as someone must be the mother and so on.⁶ During the time when I was working on *Family Portrait*, I realized my initial image of this family is composed as if I am standing outside of these relations, so then with the help of printmaking techniques, the piece came out as a diptych as I am observing the situation like an anatomist while I am engaged in this situation emotionally.

Now, during the age of digital reproduction, printmaking does not play the role of knowledge-distributor that it did during the Enlightenment. Printmaking has become a part of the economy of art. Consequently, prints are mostly produced along with other kinds of artworks; they are supposed to be sold and stored as other kinds of artworks are, merely as art objects, albeit with lower prices, in an archival fashion. Prints as art objects are more likely to be detached and frozen in a moment as much as the brutal moment of slaughtering women by Hunter and Smellie has been frozen for almost 250 years in medical archives; images were severed and isolated, disassembled but not re-assembled.⁷

There is a very strong tendency in both institutional education of printmaking and archival science to keep everything in its *original* (neutral) condition. In both, objects gain territory (or as Benjamin has named it, aura). No one can touch them unless they become trained or educated, the environmental condition is always put under control, even objects might get some rest after an exhibition as living performers would. A professional printer (or a master printer) may spend thousands of hours of hard labor to learn how to reproduce the originality of a matrix's marks through the process of editioning (thus, all editions would be identical and have the same trading value), also materials such as papers, inks, environment and etc. must meet requirements set by archival practices such as being acid-free, long-lasting and etc. Thus, not only will prints maintain their trading value over a course of time but perhaps gain some. In such conditions, the moment of (artistic) creation, the synthesis, is ultimately detached from its historical context and lives in its past and future but not in its now-time.⁸ The whole process of reproduction becomes a timeless homogeneous void, a soulless organ that consumes and reproduces itself. Like an absolute mind that encodes, stores, and retrieves a single memory; you cannot tell how many times this memory has been recalled.



Figure 2. *Déjà vu #1*, 2017, Mixed printmaking techniques, 60 x 20 in. In collaboration with Josh Orsburn. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3. *Déjà vu #2*, 2017, Mixed printmaking techniques, 20 x 90 in. In collaboration with Amanda Moris. Photo courtesy of the artist.

My two other pieces here are the result of my examinations on the meaning of institutionalized printmaking, which I developed through a teamwork with two professionally trained printers. Although editions here are individual memories of matrices, they are also memories that are chained/assembled together like historical events. As an artist who believes the same social structures reside in different realms of humanity, it is not a mere coincidence that I make individual images which need the reproduction of themselves side-by-side to maintain themselves. By doing so, I visualize the dimension of time found in the practices of art-making in such manners of reproduction. As we repeat history with the illusion of progress and we realize a certain event has happened before, in each sheet, there are elements that are needed for the next sheet to keep the illusion of the progression of time. This is to say, maybe in order to achieve real progress in our historical assemblage, we need to think about a mode of production that fills the time with now-time.

For *Déjà vu #1* (Figure 2), I used brushes to make a depiction of disassembled/ reassembled body organs. Meanwhile, for *Déjà vu #2* (Figure 3), I directly impressed my body, so that it is disassembled in each sheet, then when prints are installed right on top of each other, they (the fragments of my body's impression) are re-assembled.



Figure 4. Stills from *Persistence of Vision*, 2017, made out of 8 mm found footages from Albuquerque Basement Films, 1 min and 29 secs.

Assemblage is the matter in these days as it has mattered in the past both artistically and politically. Art practices, just like individual struggles, will never be accomplished unless they assemble themselves with other contemporary artistic/political struggles as well as with their historical paraphrased struggles. The assemblage happens in a now-time, or vice-versa, otherwise now-time without assemblage, without synthesis, would lose its meaning. I believe in order to exist in the now-time we even need not necessarily create new images but we can just assemble of what we already have. Maybe now is the time to loot the museum storages, archives, footages, and negatives. These heaps of ash, heaps of history, or trash fields of so-called human intellectual achievements, are to be re-assembled by individual or collective struggles. Let us bring the now-time into the art world that is detained between the past and the future.

NOTES

¹The title is borrowed from a short story by Kafka written and published in 1917 (German: "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie")

²One of the clients of the company that I worked for, was Red Bull and for many years I was dealing with their slogan "Red Bull gives you wings."

³Here I am under influence of Guy Debord, a French Marxist theorist who was a founding member of the Situationist International. He has many texts discussing displacement in urban context and master pieces. See Libero Andreotti, and Xavier Costa, *Theory of the Dérive and Other: Situationist Writings on the City* (Barcelona: Museu d'art contemporani de Barcelona, 1996); Guy Debord, and Gil J. Wolman, "A User's Guide to Détournement," *Les Lèvres Nues* 8 (1956).

⁴*Objet petit a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack. See Jacque Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* (112).

⁵Don C. Shelton, "The Emperor's New Clothes," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 103, no. 2 (2010): 46-50.

⁶We all might have experienced loving our family members, but this is different from the universal assumption that everyone must love their parents or their children or etc. How can we make sure these affections are more real than emotions through a group of friends or a collective? Does a family based society let us to experience other forms of collective life?

⁷Isn't it what Gilles Deleuze described as the difference between a body without organs, and an organ without a body? Or if I'm not accused to be too much sentimental (which I don't mind if I "look like" a sentimental), isn't the difference between a revolutionary and a Fascist uprising?

⁸Benjamin has termed it as *Jetztzeit* in contrast with "homogeneous empty time." See Walter Benjamin, et al., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938-1940, trans. Edmund Jephcott, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 395.

