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# the significance that cause and effect might have

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*the significance that cause and effect might have*

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A thesis presented to the  
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts  
Washington University in Saint Louis

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

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## *Abstract*

Growing up in Dayton, Ohio in the 90's, I witnessed the withdrawal of manufacturing giant, General Motors, and was witness to the cascading evisceration of manufacturing in the Midwest. This creation of the rust belt not only littered the landscape with the ruins of empty manufacturing facilities, but the collapsed economy also created a dearth of aspiration that gave traction to a rising heroin epidemic.

In my work, I depict middle America not with the bucolic sunlight of a mythical heartland, but with the illumination of industrial collapse.

## *Introduction*

An intention to be fascinated with darkness elicits scenes for me of lugubriously dramatic girls seething and smoking cigarettes across the street from the high school. That image must have come from somewhere but when I take a moment to contemplate where I, personally, have seen girls smoking cigarettes by the high school, the image blurs. The school sits on a corner in the middle of town, the sidewalk where the girls stand isn't across from the front of the school but on the side. These details aren't important to you but I cling to them because they are the only thing I know to be static. Always on that specific street, close to the alley, just to the left of the yellow run down Victorian. The view is from across the street, on the high school side. There are green leaves on the gray barked trees but the sky is overcast and it's cold. The grass has been trampled and the dirt is packed smooth where the kids smoke over the magic legal boundary of what constitutes the school's property. One girl wears a black leather motorcycle style jacket, the kind with the zippers, and has blunt cut, over-chemically processed hair like Courtney Love. Actually, she is Courtney Love and the image blurs again. And Courtney Love wouldn't have worn a black motorcycle jacket in 1995 because they weren't in style then and she wouldn't have been a student at a high school in Eaton, Ohio and anyway, she would have been 31. I don't know the genesis of this image because it didn't happen, even though I can see it. The other girl is seventeen but she looks like she is 27. Or maybe seventeen year olds think they all look like they are 27 because when I come across an actual seventeen-year-old today I think they look like they are fifteen, which is an important distinction in my head. Fifteen is a child but seventeen is an almost adult. These are constructs and so is my memory of the girls across the street from my high school. It doesn't matter, or it doesn't matter very much. When I was seventeen my

daughter was born. When she turned seventeen I thought about how absurd it all was. Or it doesn't matter. You have things like this too. We have things like this together in varying degrees.

Tom Brokaw said, "Jesus Christ" on the radio when you were driving to work. You can't say Jesus Christ on the radio, or else you shouldn't unless you are on an AM station and actually talking about the man. Not in the way he said it anyway, interrupting himself in mid-sentence because he saw something you weren't privy to. You can see what he saw now though, even though you personally wouldn't see the image until years later. People you knew also didn't see the image but described it in perfect detail. You could see the image too sometimes. Isn't Tom Brokaw a person who talks on television anyway? Not the radio... There is a woman driving beside you on route 70 who is crying. You've used that image too much, played it too often so now it is reduced to only its empirical facts. There was a woman crying while driving in a car, the car no longer has a color, make or model. When you remember it now it is a burgundy Chevy Beretta but probably only because that's the car the mother of your best friend from high school drove. It wasn't a Maserati, or a station wagon, or a pick-up truck. Or maybe it was Peter Jennings talking on the radio. Jesus Christ on route 70 and the sun shining on the gray dashboard of your own brand new Chevy. You work between the airport and the air force base and there are no planes. Those are the only things that are concrete.

There are no flights from St. Louis to Dayton anymore because now they only route through O'Hare and that's a 7-hour flight instead of a 5-hour drive. You're on route 70 again, but this time it's in Illinois and you're pointed towards a hospital on the Ohio/Indiana border. Route 70 is a ribbon of reoccurrence in your life that you try to connect to something—but really—there are no connections. You see a meteor or maybe a meteorite, it's one or both of

those things or rather it was one, but now it's the other. You never tell anyone about it because it is so insipidly saccharine for this to be happening right now and when other people tell you about things like this you inwardly roll your eyes. You plead with it. Your mom asks on the phone if you want her to call you if something happens. "Something happens" is code. You don't remember how you answered.

## *Dearth*

As viewers, we rely on connotation for representation to be identifiable. It is only when we can identify something, that then a criticality can begin by then identifying what is not. This is here, but what is missing? Absence is a thing.

When considering early forms of representation, specifically the cave paintings at Lascaux, one is bombarded with an overwhelming sense of awareness, not of what is present, but what is no longer there. When considering the cave, one never contemplates what the it would be like if it were solid rock, instead of a concave structure. Similarly, one never considers what the cave would be if the rock were absent, without the rock and earth there would be nothing at all—only empty space. Instead, the cave is an object completely dedicated to the concept of lack. The cave becomes “something” when it becomes something to fill. Unlike an empty plain, the cave has limits, it is its ability to be filled that permits the cave to have connotation. Rather, it is the cave’s lack of oblivion that allows for representation.

The original people to occupy Lascaux also felt this desire to fill the cave. Of course they needed the cave for shelter, but this doesn’t explain the drawings on Lascaux’s walls. In his essay, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*, Ernst Gombrich suggests this initial need for representation was derived in these early people from a desire to fill a different sort of void. Rather than filling the depths of the cave, the people of Lascaux sought food, and in the absence of food, “the starving may even project food into all sorts of dissimilar object”—such as the “irregular shapes on the dark cave walls.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E. H. Gombrich (Ernst Hans), *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (London] : Greenwich, Conn.: Phaidon Publishers ; distributed by New York Graphic Society Publishers, 1963).



For something to be coveted, in some way, it must be absent. Not only can one not covet something they already have, they also cannot covet something that they are not aware exists. The concept of absence cannot be considered to be null, but rather, it can be viewed as a negative amount. This negative amount defines lack, not as something that does not now, nor has never existed, but something that once existed but now is absent. Lack directly correlates with desire, because for desire to exist, the object of desire must be absent.

## *Night Paintings*

*When [...] the world of clear and articulate objects is abolished, our perceptual being, cut off from its world, evolves a spatiality without things. This is what happens in the night. Night is not an object before me; it enwraps me and infiltrates through all my senses, stifling my recollections and almost destroying my personal identity.<sup>2</sup>*



Figure 1, Sara Fleenor, *Untitled View of Night Windows*, 2015. Oil on wood panel. 30 x 22 inches

*Untitled View Inside Windows* was the first of my series of night paintings. The windows externalize anxiety by providing the view of an interior which cannot be accessed. I use the darkness as a tool to isolate the viewer, and to suggest a sort of trespassing, or rather the contrition of a reluctant voyeur. There are no visible people in the night paintings but portrayals

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2012). p. 330.

of interior light indicate presence. A window lit from within is evidence of occupancy and yet the window remains blank, absenting the subject from view. The point of view of the painting is always from outside looking in, a metaphor for isolation.



Figure 2. Edward Hopper, *Night Windows*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 29 x 34 inches.

Hopper understood that anonymity and solitude are connected aspects of modernity and his work reflects this relationship. The artist strategically uses windows as both formal and psychological elements. In *Night Windows*, the warmth within contrasts to the darkness that the viewer experiences from being outside of the realm of the light. This contrast demonstrates the feeling of solitude conveyed by the physical separation of the window. While both the viewer and

the subject are relatively close in proximity, this closeness offers no intimacy between the two as they are unequivocally separate. The woman turns her back to the window in an attempt at modesty but only half-heartedly as the viewer from the train is anonymous to her.



Figure 3, Sara Fleenor, *Bus Barn 2*, 2015. Oil on canvas, 42 x 48 inches.

Similar to Edward Hopper's night paintings, I use the contrast between darkness and artificial light to create a feeling of void. The foreground of *Bus Barn 1* is brightly lit, but the light only serves to illuminate the emptiness of the street. Rather than the welcoming warmth of natural light, this light is chilly and sterile. The synthetic nature of the light suggests

intentionality while asking the viewer to consider the purpose of using an electric sun to exhibit an empty expanse of concrete. The uncanny can be found in the juxtaposition of the familiar with the unfamiliar.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 4. Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942. 33 1/8 x 60 inches.

In paintings such as Hopper's *Nighthawks*, the yellow glow, which is noticeable on the diner walls is specific to incandescent lights which had become prevalent in public spaces during the 1940s. Similarly, I incorporate the cool blue glow of LED bulbs to place the painting at or after a specific time when the bulbs came to prominence for public buildings in the late 2000s. These alien blue lights, juxtaposed with the warm incandescent squares of light in the background suggest that the viewer is looking backward in time, possibly into a memory.

Synthetic light is a product of modernity and therefore technology. The technology of artificial light gave us the ability to conquer the night but also removed the need for the

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Iversen, "In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny," *Art History* 21, no. 3 (1998): 409–429, doi:10.1111/1467-8365.00116.

collectivism of the fire. Isolation was a physical danger to ancient people but to modern people it is a psychological problem.

My buildings, in various states of dereliction, are references to bodies and their light is a reference to the inner self, or the mind. Dark and Light are a dichotomy between positive and negative and terms are used to speak about the mind. The Enlightenment, was a period defined by advances in science, versus the Dark Ages, a time erroneously considered to be defined by lack of human achievement. This position is used to depict emotions and temperaments which are experiences of the mind, “she is carefree and light hearted” or “she has a heart of darkness”.



Figure 5. Sara Fleenor, *Bus Barn 2*, 2016. Oil on wood panel, 48 x 40 inches.

*Bus Barn 2*, employs this dark/light dichotomy to describe synthetic emotions experienced through chemical dependency. The light doesn't simply radiate from the windows,

it drips, giving the formlessness of light the material substance of liquid. The formal choice of white is because it is the color of heroin and white's lack of chroma also speaks to the artificiality of the synthetic. Euphoria experienced through drug use is a sort of false emotion, as its referent is only the drug and not experience.

Both *Bus Barn 1* and *Bus Barn 2* were influenced by my personal experience. During my first semester of graduate school, three people who I had went to high school with had died from opioid overdoses. Death is upsetting, but my level of distress was extreme considering that I had graduated from high school almost 20 years ago and these people were no longer in my life. On reflection after completing *Bus Barn 1*, I had the revelation that I had just moved to St. Louis and these people were representative of home for me, and being extremely homesick, I was sensitive to any disruption in my personal narrative concerning that place. I created *Bus Barn 2* in response to this revelation. The newer painting is in a way a self-portrait which was my reasoning for centrally framing the image on the panel. I was also experiencing synthetic emotion in my own right as I was prescribed the anti-depressant Prozac. Prozac improved my depression but while taking it, I also experienced brief instances of dissociation, which I can describe as the feeling of looking into a mirror and not recognizing that image looking back is one's own reflection.

I share content with Larry Clark, although the form I use in painting is different. The introduction to Larry Clark's photobook, *Tulsa*, is as follows:

*i was born in tulsa oklahoma in 1943. when i was sixteen i started shooting amphetamine. i shot with my friends everyday for three years and then left town but i've gone back through the years. once the needle goes in it never comes out. L.C<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Clark, *Tulsa* (New York: Rapoport, 1971). p. 1.



Figure 6. Larry Clark, *Couple*, 1971. Silver gelatin print, 8 x 10 inches.

*Couple* is one of 56 gelatin black and white photographs that comprise the pages *Tulsa*. *Couple* depicts an anonymous female figure, her head cropped out of the photo, as she sits astride her bearded Christ like lover while he administers to her vein the sacrament of a syringe of amphetamine. Almost 2,000 miles from San Francisco, Tulsa Oklahoma was far from Haight-Ashbury and its summer of love but its proximity exemplifies the depth of this cultural revolution as American phenomenon. Or are the figures in *Tulsa* like plants too far from the sun—twisted and ghostly for lack of light?



## *White Castle*



Figure 7. Sara Fleenor, *White Castle*, 2016. Oil on wood panel, 24 x 30 inches.

Your initial experience with the restaurant begins inside a vehicle, as White Castle is a driving rather than a walking destination. The chain began in Wichita Kansas before spreading throughout the American Midwest and the horizontal sprawling scale of the Midwest demands a vehicle. The Midwest is a visual paradox of scale issues, with vast open spaces connecting smallish buildings rarely over a few stories high. Perhaps this is the reason why White Castle, in its near century of history never made it much past the region of its inception. Your initial experience is always from afar, allowing you to perceive a building free from flaws, a clean white

toy castle, its parking lot suggesting the idea of a mote, its windows festooned with royal blue canopies. Without this visual space allowed by the distance between the road or street and the structure, the building loses its visual impact.

The crenelated battlements adorning the building give no attempt to mask their lack of function. The battlements found originally in ancient architecture were constructed as defensive structures and by advantage of altitude, defenders housed there could lodge arrows at attackers below. The contemporary White Castle restaurant, of course has no such need to physically defend its building from marauding attackers but rather the gestalt of the building is a marketing technique meant to convey safety within. Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, exposing the unsanitary conditions of the meat packing industry was published in 1906 and was still relevant at White Castle's founding in 1921 and the restaurant's motif was meant to convey the safety of the hamburgers.

The cleanliness of food is no longer a valid marketing technique as FDA sanitation regulations in America ensure food is clean, especially in respect to the nonexistent standards when Sinclair's novel was published. And yet, White Castle still exists in its castle form, its branding system hardly changing since the twenties. Its appeal and therefore its market sustainability is because it's unapologetically kitsch.

I use the phrase unapologetically kitsch because the image has become more complicated than it was in the twenties. In the twenties it was simply kitsch, faked sentiment, with the gaudy toy buildings being mass produced just like the restaurant's hamburgers. Where Greenberg wrote that "kitsch is deceptive", White Castle is not, or at least it's not anymore.

## *Labor, Class, and the Building*

*Things that exist exist, and everything is on their side. They're here, which is pretty puzzling. Nothing can be said of things that don't exist. Things exist in the same way if that is all that is considered—which may be because we feel that or because that is what the word means or both. Everything is equal, just existing, and the values and interests they have are only adventitious.<sup>5</sup>*



Figure 8. Donald Judd, *15 untitled works in concrete*, 1980-84. Poured concrete, 250 x 250 x 500 cm.

Adventitious, as in the thing's value coming from an outside source is illustrated in Judd's *15 untitled works in concrete*. The term value can be defined in one of two ways, first in the capitalistic sense as in the monetary worth of the thing, and then the level of importance placed on the thing. They are simple structures, concrete boxes roughly the size of a long narrow room in a house, and could be replicated by another artist or a person who pours concrete driveways

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Judd, Clara Távora Vilar, and Nuno Carvalho, *Donald Judd: Escultura, gravura, mobiliário = sculpture, prints, furniture: Centro Cultural de Belém* (Lisbon: Ministério de Cultura : Centro Cultural de Belém, 1997). p. 12.

and basements. If desired, someone might make one or several of these things and put them in a back yard, as the exact dimensions of the objects can be found on Chinati's website.<sup>6</sup> The level of importance becomes more complicated. The thingness of the things is encompassed in this complication, they are structures but not buildings and yet the exact geometry suggests intent—although without functional purpose.

It's listed that the *15 untitled works in concrete* were created in the early 1980's, a fact that is not evident to the viewer. Time stops in the desert in West Texas, the tall grasses being eternally yellow. The only sound in the expanse is the wind. There is little water to wear and then penetrate and freeze and crack the untitled works. The gestalt of the pieces in the desert suggests they might have been made last year, or 100 years ago, or 100 years from now. If some odd force did arrive to desecrate the untitled works, or if modernity manifested more opaquely in Marfa, they might be built again somewhere even more desolate.

Judd's pieces' ability to effectively negate time is directly correlated to the fact that they also leave no evidence of their creation. Creation is based on technology and therefore time. When we think of a stone house, one can also imagine such a thing being a monument to manual labor in that this labor is evident through the size and weight of the stones and the amount of effort used to place them. Brick structures reflect an advancement in technology over stone in the brick's size is not predicated by nature but by man in that its shape and size directly relates to that of the hand that lays the bricks. Susan Stewart suggests this advancement of

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<sup>6</sup> "The Chinati Foundation | La Fundación Chinati," accessed April 10, 2017, <https://www.chinati.org/collection/donaldjudd2.php>.

technology isn't to simply remove labor but rather that "It works to make invisible the labor that produced it, to appear as its own object, and thus to be self-perpetuating."<sup>7</sup>

Removing labor from a thing correlates to the stratification of class by dividing people into authors who are named and laborers whose identities are concealed. Early America specifically divided its class system this way by creating a "legal distinction [which] existed between the free and the unfree, the latter including not only slaves but also indentured servants, convict laborers, and apprentices."<sup>8</sup>

*Hand Painted Oil Paintings* was an exploration of relationships between labor and authorship. I gleaned photos of mass produced drinking vessels from eBay listings, then painted individual works from each image, incorporating these images' photography quirks as well as backgrounds that denoted ideas about the sellers attempts at, or apathy to, product marketing. After finishing the paintings, I photographed them in settings from my own environment, and then listed them for sale—again on eBay. When I listed my paintings, they became ten pieces of 41,657 other paintings listed as "Hand Painted Oil Paintings" and had become part of the global market of piecework things.

The cups, glasses, mugs, etc. that I chose were objects from my memory. At first this wasn't my intention, but upon entering a search for "vintage coffee mug", I found many of these things to be recognizable as items from my past. Among other items, the search produced a McDonald's coffee mug commemorating the 1980 Olympics that my grandfather had owned, a smallish mug featuring the face of Santa Claus that my father had kept in a china cabinet, and a

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 1st paperback ed (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Isenberg author, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*, 2016. p. 72.

blue rimmed Margarita glass from a set that I had received as a housewarming gift that was never used.

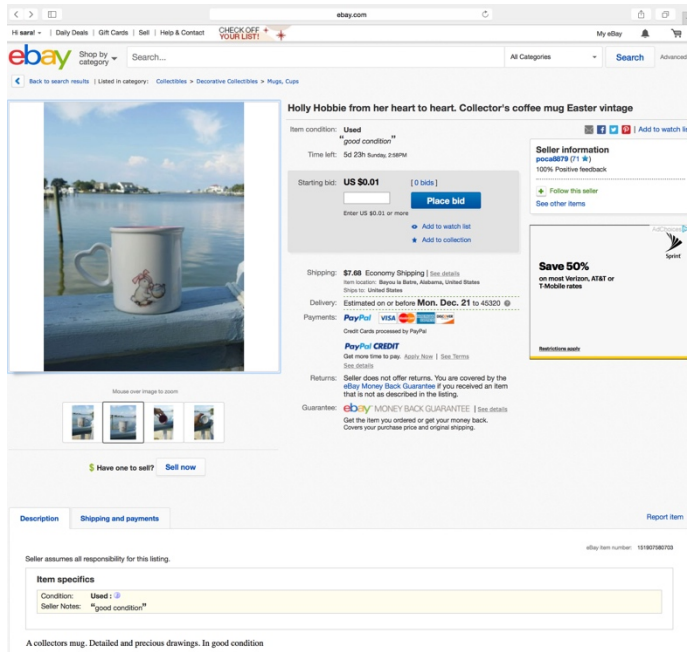


Figure 9. Sara Fleenor, detail of *Handmade Oil Paintings*. Screen capture, various sizes.

A drinking vessel is an intermediary between hand and mouth, and therefore it serves as a connection between the exterior and interior of the body. The hand is social, and like the brick, a drinking vessel is made to fit the hand, as the hand is a tool. Selling these items secondhand, one considers the cup's intimacy with the mouth which also makes it a very personal item, as the mouth is an "aperture of ingestion" and "work[s] to constitute the notion of the subject, the individual body, and ultimately the self".<sup>9</sup>

Merleau-Ponty points out that an artist "changes the world into paintings" by "lending his body to the world".<sup>10</sup> A painting is always a record of the body of the artist who paints it and

<sup>9</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*. p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993). p. 123.

therefore an intimate item. Hand painted paintings found at American discount stores such as Walmart are evidence of this commodification of intimacy. These paintings are made in art making sweatshops in China where artists paint reproductions of famous works of art.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 10. Thomas Kinkadee, *Everett's Cottage*, 1998. Canvas lithograph, various dimensions.

Similar in method of production, *Everett's Cottage* is not a unique painting—actually most of the pieces titled “*Everett's Cottage*” might not accurately be called paintings at all as each iteration of the image is one of many thousands of lithographs on canvas, some with an overlay of a few painted brushstrokes. The validity of the status of *Everett's Cottage* as a painting is

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<sup>11</sup> “China’s Art Factories: Van Gogh From the Sweatshop - SPIEGEL ONLINE,” accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/china-s-art-factories-van-gogh-from-the-sweatshop-a-433134.html>.

debatable, as is the status of its creator, Thomas Kinkade as an artist. Likewise, even referring to him as the creator of *Everett's Cottage* could be considered an embellishment. Of the works disseminated by Media Arts Group Inc., the once publicly traded company dedicated to the production and circulation of Kinkade's work, only the prints at the highest echelon of the company's pricing structure have actually been touched by Kinkade himself.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mike Rogers, "I Believe in Thomas Kinkade," *ArtUS*, no. 4 (October 9, 2004): 27–35. p. 28.



## *Body, Ideology, and the Landscape*

*I kissed America  
When she was fleeing me  
And she knows I understand  
That she needs to be free*

*I miss America  
And sometimes she does too  
And sometimes I think of her  
When she is fucking you<sup>13</sup>*



Figure 11. Sara Fleenor, *Modern Love*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 72 x 120 inches.

The white-tailed deer of Northern America have never been fully domesticated as beasts of burden or for food as that the modern cow or horse. Unlike its ruminant brethren, deer live beyond the confines of the barnyard or commercial stockyard, wandering rural areas at will,

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<sup>13</sup> Byrne, David. "Miss America." *Feelings*. CD. Warner Bros. 1997.

visible to humans seemingly by chance. Its image has been integrated into logos for products representing rugged, masculine culture including hunting rifles, tractors, and domestic beer.

The perception of the white-tailed deer as “free” allows the creature’s image to become a projection of nostalgia. Susan Stewart describes nostalgia as being, “always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as a narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack.”<sup>14</sup> This felt lack is in the discrepancy between the ambiguous concept of freedom and the creation myth of the founding of the United States. The deer are perceived to be free from the confines of civilization and this quality of liberty resonates strongly with the American white middle class. As mentioned above, men in early America were defined as either free wealthy landowners or unfree laborers (women, like children were considered dependents of their husbands or fathers). This classification system began to change before the Revolutionary War as the wealthy elite began to afford privileges such as voting rights to the white “middling class”.<sup>15</sup> Rather than social conscious, this “freedom” was advantageous for the wealthy upper class as it inspired patriotism among the middle class in the political climate of the impending Revolutionary War. Also, allying the upper class with the middle class deterred the middle class from ideologically aligning themselves with poorer whites, slaves, and Native Americans. Freedom is an ideology promoted to make invisible, rather than abolish, the American class system.

The deer featured in *Modern Love*, Glitter Deer, is representation of ideology materialized. The deer’s glitter as well as the exaggerated proportions of his hooves, allows

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<sup>14</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*.

<sup>15</sup> Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove, *A People’s History of the United States*, Thirty-fifth anniversary edition, Harper Perennial Modern Classics (New York: HarperPerennial, 2015). p. 57.

recognition of the deer as a Christmas ornament, and through an understanding of scale between tree and deer, he is realized to be miniature. Susan Stewart writes “the miniature becomes a stage on which we project, by means of association or intertextuality, a deliberately framed series of actions.”<sup>16</sup> Through association with the white-tailed deer being indigenous to the United States, Glitter Deer is a creature intrinsically tied to the land and his action is his facility to exercise freedom by wandering this land.



Figure 12. Marc Swanson, *Fits and Starts*, 2004. Crystals, steel and polyurethane foam.

The white-tailed deer becomes a fetishized object when associated with rural life, hunting, and masculinity. Marc Swanson explores the relationship between hunting and maleness with his layered totem *Fits and Starts*. Male dominated hunting practices predate

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<sup>16</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*. p. 53.

humanity and evidence of this is expressed through male centric hunting techniques employed by modern man's closest living relative, the chimpanzee.<sup>17</sup> Through the lens of consumerism we can observe evidence of the deer's fetishization with branding of products like John Deere tractors, Stag Beer, and Browning firearms.



Figure 13. John Deere, Stag Beer, and Browning Arms Company logos

Premises of my work, such as belief systems or concepts, are products of the mind. I use representation to portray the incorporeal, but also, I encode my images as a sort of protective barrier between myself and the viewer because my paintings are also autobiographical. During my first semester of graduate school, my partner of 11 years, Mark, was admitted into the hospital three days before my semester end review. I left St. Louis and my graduate program and arrived at a hospital in Indiana in the middle of the night. The next morning I was told by a physician that Mark was experiencing kidney and heart failure due to a prolonged period of uncontrolled high blood pressure. Mark had experienced headaches consistently for over ten years and before the summer that I moved to St. Louis there were indications that he was urinating blood. When I would bring this up to him, he just seemed annoyed, so I let it go.

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<sup>17</sup> "Chimpanzee Hunting Behavior and Human Evolution » American Scientist," accessed May 3, 2017, <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/pub/chimpanzee-hunting-behavior-and-human-evolution/1>.

I know this sounds strange. It sounds like he was incapable of understanding the ramifications these physical systems portended. I know it sounds like I just didn't care. But I feel we were both responding to unspoken ideologies that dictated both of our behaviors in the context of gender normative behavior.

*Modern Love* is a dichotomy between body and machismo but making it was also a way for me to do something constructive with the anxiety I've felt since Mark's initial hospital stay. Masculinity is linked to health in that "males use health beliefs and behaviours to demonstrate dominant—and hegemonic—masculine ideals that clearly establish them as men."<sup>18</sup> Consequently, when men become ill, the "gender ramifications are often great. Illness can reduce a man's status in masculine hierarchies, shift his power relations with women, and raise his self-doubts about masculinity."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Will H Courtenay, "Constructions of Masculinity and Their Influence on Men's Well-Being: A Theory of Gender and Health," *Social Science & Medicine* 50, no. 10 (May 2000): 1385–1401, doi:10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00390-1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## *Conclusion*

The worst thing I ever saw was a deer that had been hit on the side of the road. I guess it must have been hit by a semi because whatever had hit it wasn't there anymore and the insides that were all over the road were still shiny. You couldn't tell if it was one deer or two. It was that bad. But that wasn't the bad part. I mean it wasn't the good part. But you know what I mean. The worst part was there was another deer, a doe, that had her head down and was sort of sniffing at the other deer's body. Or part of it anyway. God. And then she looked up at me and I wondered what she was thinking. How much she understood.

No. That wasn't the worst thing I ever saw.

I had a friend from high school who got shot by her husband. It was something to do with drugs. I don't know. I hadn't seen her in years but I went to her funeral anyway. The front part of the casket was open, like they do, and her belly looked really flat, like in a weird way, and you could tell that's where she had been shot. I mean, you couldn't see the wound or anything, but you could tell where they tried to make it look ok. There was another girl there who kept giving me shitty looks like I didn't have the right to be there. She had stolen my sweatshirt in the eighth grade during gym class. It was a dark blue Notre Dame sweatshirt with gold embroidery on the letters and I really liked it. I guess I wouldn't remember that sweatshirt now if she hadn't stolen it.

I don't know why we remember bad things so clearly but it seems like good memories are hard to hold on to.

I really love the beach. On the last day before we go home, I try to really look at it, you know, so I can remember what it's really like. So I can save it for later, I guess. It's just the memory that I liked it that seems to remain, not the exact color of the water or the sky or anything. And then that makes me kind of sad.

Maybe that's why we like sunsets so much but people don't really go on about sunrises in the same way. Maybe it's seeing something ending that makes it so precious. I guess it has something to do with safety, so we don't keep doing the same things over and over again.

Maybe that's how memory works. I don't know.

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