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Recent Propaganda: Artist's Statement

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: JOHN TRUEX

College: ARTS AND SCIENCES Department: SCHOOL OF ART - SCULPTURE

Faculty Mentor: JASON S. BROWN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

PROJECT TITLE: RECENT PROPAGANDA

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed:  J. BROWN, Faculty Mentor

Date: 5-3-04

Comments (Optional):

John Truex
BFA Sculpture
Honors Project

I've attached a hard copy of my artist's statement for the series of work that I am presenting for my Honors Project. Also enclosed is a cd with the text in a web page with links to images of the work. Please open index.html in a web browser to view the project.

Thank you,
John Truex

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JTR', written in a stylized, cursive script.

John Truex

Honors Project

Recent Propaganda: Artist's Statement

My work exists within the boundary of art and design, relying on the language of architectural, industrial, and fashion design to inform concepts central to contemporary art. Essentially a study in product development, the *Recent Propaganda* series infiltrates the field of marketable consumer goods. Rather than producing for an established market, I seek to create objects whose functionality and pseudo-functionality undermine the market in which they appear to exist. The products create their own niche in the frivolity of high-end consumerism. They draw from – and heighten viewer awareness of – the machinery of design and consumption.

Developing from my previous work, products in the series concern mental and physical constraint of the individual, specifically the oppression arising from the current cultural atmosphere of paranoia. Using satire as the primary means for political dissidence, they seek to liberate the viewer from the norms of contemporary society and to propose alternate perspectives on the increasingly homogenous culture of fear and retribution. The products are derived from, are produced by, and cater to artificial social scenarios which parody the sociopolitical status quo and propose different cultural realities.

The *Recent Propaganda* exhibition, representing the first of my pieces in the series, was done in September 2003 in collaboration with UT graphic design student Jeff Baxter. He and I also set up a show entitled *Art Not War* in the University Center Plaza in April 2003, which consisted of more overtly antiwar art than our subsequent work and became the basis of development for pieces which contained the same level of political activism but which were more integrated with our personal interests and artistic discussions.

WoMB (Weapons of Mass-Destruction Bunker), the first piece completed in the series, is a computer model and subsequent printed displays and advertisements for a fashionable bomb shelter for upscale consumers. The bomb shelter is presented as an object of desire,

the perfect addition to the personal safety collection of any successful businessperson. It is superimposed in fashion magazine pages and billed as the hottest item on the market. The shelter is, in fact, a completely non-functional vessel, a useless object created with the aesthetic of military-industrial functionality but with no promise or reassurance that it actually provides protection, simply slickly made advertisements and fashion models.

Hazmat Dress (Why Sacrifice Style for Safety?) follows, continuing the theme of fashion design as a solution to uncomfortable and out of style emergency preparedness equipment. A dress made out of actual Tychem chemical protection suits available online from Emergency Preparedness International, *Hazmat Dress* is the quintessential paranoia/desire marketing item in the series. It plays off of the dichotomy between the appearance and aesthetic of safety gear and the complete lack of protection that it provides (being a sleeveless cocktail dress).

Sensory Deprivation Devices (Television Helmets) provide the same pseudo-protection while twisting the definition of protective gear. It blocks hearing and vision in an ignorance-is-bliss rejection of any outside danger, also referencing the dangerous isolationism and empiricism of US politics. Television, which could provide dangerous or disturbing information in a war obsessed cultural atmosphere, is replaced by the helmets, offered as a new and different type of sedative.

Couch (Bomb Shelter), created after the exhibition, continues the parody of paranoia culture, offering the latest in design convergence and allowing the consumer to stay ready for the inevitable bomb blast without sacrificing the stylish furnishings essential to modern life. The one-person protection offered by the couch also creates a sense of self sufficiency.

Weapons of Masturbation, a performance that I did in the Woodruff building downtown, summarizes my feelings concerning the War on Terror and represents a subtle shift from the consumerism parody of the previous pieces towards more direct public dissent. Dressed in a biohazard suit and armed with my Safety Vacuum I laid down a trail of

white powder (flour) and then tried to clean it up with the vacuum cleaner, which only shot it out the other end in a cloud which created a much larger mess. While creating a humorous process of futility, the performance portrayed my personal interpretation of the cycle of retaliation and perpetuated retribution, as well as the cycle of government coaxed paranoia and reassurance.

Duet is a digitally altered sound piece consisting of speech and press conference excerpts by George W. Bush and Donald Rumsfeld. Without using any outside material, I composed the piece using their manipulated voices, allowing the issues that concern and upset me to be directly explained by those who created them. The digital sound file also offers an opportunity for politically active art to be widely disseminated by simply emailing it or burning it to a disc.