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## Play Doh's Cave and The Pursuit of the American Cream

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**Play Doh's Cave**  
**and**  
**The Pursuit of the American Cream**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art in  
Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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May 2015

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## **Abstract**

Take a minute. Imagine Wiley Coyote and Road Runner are in a domestic partnership. What would that look like? Close your eyes and Pause for 30 seconds. Don't you see? Coyote never catches up. They keep running faster and faster. Everything in the house gets swept into the whirlwind they've created in their paths - the books, the shelves, the bed, and the desk lamp. Their circling movement creates a vacuum, which ultimately causes the entire structure to implode upon itself.

This text is an examination of my work and its relationship to the economic and the domestic. The metaphor of the tragicomic perpetually failing in the spotlight is a dominant motif standing against a backdrop of an overflowing bloat of unidentifiable mass desperately trying to repel gravity. In the first section of this text I offer a brief overview of my two-year trajectory, and an analytical perspective of my culminating thesis exhibition. In the second section, I share with you a trough of incomplete jokes, and standalone punch lines. This Rolodex I keep of "word sketches" catalogues my search for the shape of a laugh.

I. A Surrogate to Displace My Subjectivity





I create objects or structures that I can hide in, or use to camouflage myself. Many contain holes that serve to expose and isolate specific body parts, capturing the viewer's curiosity while maintaining discretion and anonymity. The holes also act as a window to the outside from within these hermetic structures. In a recent piece, *Tourist*, a folding table stands upright like a figure standing in the room. At eye-level, there is an oval shaped opening for a face to press itself against for a melancholic version of your childhood vacation



photograph. Using familiar forms I construct an immediate and relatable visual impact. Creating visual analogies between my surroundings and myself highlights the absurdity of our culture's brand of social conditioning and perceptions of femininity. The slant humor behind the work is disarming, while poking a pinky finger at my ongoing investigation of gender, body, and identity.

In a recent installation, inside the attic of an old diner, there hangs a seven-foot tall tee shirt with silver collegiate lettering reading “I’M SINGLE!” A caricature of a divorcee in the form of an oversized gag tee found at the boardwalk gift shop, the shirt is emblematic of an awkward balance between ostentatious and self-deprecating.







I have a particular interest in the body and how it relates to a space—its interaction with the physical world and its cultural environment. In *Windssocks* a large painting hangs on the wall with a windssock protruding from the center. Paired with the painting is a matching tee shirt I wear. Marking the ebbs and flows of art and culture in the same spirit of the mimetic tradition, our windssocks indicate that myself and the painting channel the same wind direction, both walking the tight rope between subject and object.



Each piece is driven by concept and employs a different set of tools and materials. I work intuitively, building upon basic forms and concepts as I go. Ideas are born from a particularly compelling fragment of speech, a subtle movement, or an intriguing physical form. Through artistic investigation, I uncover their underlying content and actualize it through sculptures built from foam, wood, fabric, and metal, which in turn become tools for performances, videos, and photographs.

My most recent project is an installation inside a 1968 thirty-foot airstream trailer. The interior is stripped bare with the exception of milk crates, an absent figure, and a large projection on the far end of the trailer. Playing endlessly is a video showing an overflowing soft-serve ice cream machine on the stage of the historic 1920's era Byrd Theatre, a time capsule of American grandeur. This subject on view, standing in the spotlight, spews gallons of ice cream onto the floor.



The excessive amount of wasted milk spilling onto itself is a stand-up comic standing-in for so many things: the weeping matriarch, a comedian “bombing” onstage, humiliation, peeing in public, loss of control, milk prices rising, and the failure of the American agribusiness. At the front of the trailer, an homage to the Flintstones-mobile interrupts the utopian modernist attitude of this iconic mobile home. A pair of yellow-ochre chest waders are suspended from the ceiling, passing through the floor’s surface, for the driver to tow the wagon by foot.

## II. Joke Book: Punch Line as Image

“What if there were no punch lines? What if there were no indicators? What if I created tension and never released it? What if I headed for a climax, but all I delivered was an anticlimax? What would the audience do with all that tension? Theoretically, it would have to come out sometime. But if I kept denying them the formality of a punch line, the audience would eventually pick their own place to laugh, essentially out of desperation. This type of laugh seemed stronger to me, as they would be laughing at something they chose, rather than being told exactly when to laugh.”

— Steve Martin, *Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life*

I literally just saw a clown get out of a car.

If I haven't seen someone in a month or so, I just assume they don't like me, which is soooorta true if you think about it.

*I Dunno*, a 21<sup>st</sup> century love story



Missed Connection: Pretty girl at Babes W4W:

My glass eyes fell out and rolled under the table. You helped me look for it. I felt a real connection.

I need thirty years of intensive therapy so I don't die alone wearing my Nirvana tee shirt I bought from Old Navy.

Hey, did you flirt with me like three years ago? I can't remember.

Ah man, memory foam turns out to be the cause of our extinction.

Ah man, Kim Kardashian ruined my marriage again.

Yelling "I'm a phony!" but no one seems too worried so I guess I'll continue eating this ten-year-old box of Trisquits under the covers.

I just remembered there's going to be a moat around my new house.

"Play-Dohs Cave"

I can't hold down a steady job because my mom won't let me bring my chew toy to work.

A wise man once told me, the thing most people don't know about snakes is that they could lose their head.

If the shoe fits wear it, but it's probably gonna kill you.

The tower of babel didn't have emojis though.

Well, my mans got a Camaro and bunk beds.

A body of work: Couches that resemble Steve Buscemi

Every word I've ever had to look up in the dictionary, I've had to look up every time I've heard it used.

The cinematic trope of someone eating while crying

If gutter punks were clever, their signs would say, "need money for facial tattoo removal."

A qualitative difference between being humble and lazy

I'd rather be shot dead than be caught googling "hot liberals."

Mcaulyflower Culkin

A distribution of wealth analyzed by disparate toilet bowl prices

Sext: laying in bed thinking about those cups of shitty pens with fake flowers taped to them in doctor's waiting rooms.

The six year old boys fought over who could make a bigger chalk drawing of a "*you know what...*" At least at this age they are transparent.

Why does being delusional have such negative connotations, I think I might be enjoying it.

I had so much fun online last night!!

I heard you get to circle jerk till you're like forty-five or something.

These pants are suspiciously itchy.

I caught that pause before you said "my sorority."

Give me one goddamn reason why a pair of pants would ever be itchy.

According to the principles of economics a measure of currency is a measure of trust you have that the other person wants to fuck you also.

"The best things in life are free" is a colonialist ideology.

A Doody Pile





Thesis draft: “Pornography is capitalism at it’s finest.”

There is absolutely nothing you couldn’t learn from Pavlov’s dogs.

Shorty was an imperialist.

I can see the history of mankind is in the subtle movement of his eyebrow.

Someone on their lunch break is eating mini cupcakes.

Fake tits and camo

Instances of compensation: humans deprive their muscles to bring more nutrients to the brain; deer deprive their bones of calcium to bring more to their antlers...

Our desire is a yearning for unmediated experience.

Good sex ended when we lost our fine joinery skills at the advent of the screw.

Pavlov’s dogs should teach classes on dating.

Thesis draft: Madonna’s ‘Like a Virgin’ is the best critique of capitalism from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Q: What are you up to?

A:

# SOUND EFFECT

## Squeaky Toy



Did you know there are actually only three artists in the whole world and they are all named Ai Wei Wei?

Thesis draft: Drawing A Constellation:

#bodybuilding#porn#primatology#dollyparton#cow girls#ecology#landacquisition

I'm trying to have kids so I can start my lemonade stand.

A good idea for a business would be to \*gets shat on by a bird\*

Plastic surgery vs. the body ecology reading list: *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, and *How Men Really Feel About Breast Implants*

Writing my dissertation, \*looks up term "premature ejaculation"\*

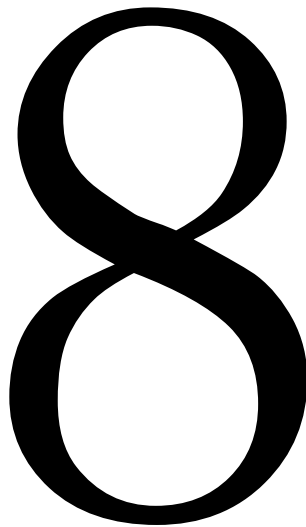
Boogers vs. feathers

I wish my grandma was here to see me all grown up and polishing my high heels with a tampon I found in my glove compartment.

Shit on my dick > Fuck a duck

Saying "hey" to a bird

Did you know that the number 8 actually came from the word “snowman?”





Maybe we'll get married

**\*thinking about a tumbleweed rolling down the street\***

Look at the moon,



Government issued incentives for refusal to use hashtags

Government issued incentives for every time you thought of an idea for a tattoo and didn't get it

I'm gunna bet the people who believe this is a free country also actually wear underwear.

Every journalist should go skip rocks in a pond or something.

If you've made it to 30 without a severe drug addiction or becoming morbidly obese, you should get a Nobel Prize.

"Faux garbage"

No matter what you do you're in advertising.

There really is such incredibly opportunity in the place where your pant leg meets the rim of your boot and your sock is slightly exposed.

"Post-hurricane"

Blotting my lipstick on this meditation schedule makes me think maybe I'm not cut out for Buddhism.

If you're having a hard time getting a boyfriend, practice taming a wild dog.

I was the first person to ever be baptized in their piss.

How am I going to afford the trip to Disney world this year?

Blowing my materials budget on a horse

Is that a man or a cello?

Pizza? I don't even know ya!

I haven't read much Nietzsche but from what I understand, I'm pretty sure I could take him  
in a boxing ring.

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Martin, Steve. *Born Standing Up: A Comics Life*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2007

## Vita

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