

MONKEY PENIS: THE PRICE OF A BORDER SOUVENIR

by

CLAYTON JOSEPH HURT

Bachelor of Fine Arts, 2005  
University of North Texas  
Denton, Texas

Submitted to the Faculty  
Graduate Division  
College of Fine Arts  
Texas Christian University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Masters of Fine Arts

May, 2007

MONKEY PENIS: THE PRICE OF A BORDER SOUVENIR

Thesis approved:

Cam Schoepp

---

Major Professor

Chris Powell

Fran Colpitt

H.J. Butler

---

Graduate Studies Representative  
For the College of Fine Arts

Copyright © 2007 by Clayton Joseph Hurt  
All rights reserved

This thesis is dedicated to the Neeley School of Business and Nano Pop.

## Table of Contents

1	Title Page
2	Approval
3	Copyright
4	Dedication
5	Table of Contents
6	List of Plates
7	List of Plates
8	Thesis
12	Plates
32	Vita
33	Abstract

## List of Plates

Plate		Page
1.	<i>Fuck Monkey</i> mixed media 2007	12
2.	<i>Fuck Monkey</i> (detail) mixed media 2007	13
3.	<i>HORSEKISSMONKEY</i> cement and steel 2007	14
4.	<i>HORSEKISSMONKEY</i> (detail) cement and steel 2007	15
5.	<i>HORSEKISSMONKEY</i> (detail) cement and steel 2007	16
6.	<i>Pretty Like That</i> cement and steel 2007	17
7.	<i>Pretty Like That</i> (detail) cement and steel 2007	18
8.	<i>Six Hares High</i> clay 2007	19
9.	<i>Six Hares High</i> (detail) clay 2007	20

10.	<i>Aye Pobre Animal</i> mixed media 2007	21
11.	<i>Aye Pobre Animal</i> (detail) mixed media 2007	22
12.	<i>JMONK</i> mixed media 2007	23
13.	<i>JMONK</i> mixed media 2007	24
14.	<i>Back Cheese</i> mixed media 2007	25
15.	<i>Alterego</i> cement, wax, plastic, steel and paper 2007	26
16.	<i>Alterego</i> (detail) cement, wax, plastic, steel and paper 2007	27
17.	<i>Alterego</i> (detail) cement, wax, plastic, steel and paper 2007	28
18.	Installation view	29
19.	Installation view	30
20.	Installation view	31

## MONKEY PENIS: THE PRICE OF A BORDER SOUVENIR

A person walks up to a stand and is sold a story, a promise of something, or a prize; a monkey penis for example, from the jungles of South America. Guaranteed to increase your luck in your sex life, ah how much? Transformed and enhanced, the mostly masked object is really just some dried-up rawhide. And if sold to the right person, it is possibly worth a first-born or a second wife. In the story, language and material are twisted. A box can be more than a box, and a plate is more than what is on it. So it may be a monkey penis or a stable income for a family, but it is something.

The work in this thesis show is an extension of my work with animals. My animal work started four years ago while I was an undergraduate sculpture major. It was at the University of North Texas that I realized I was growing tired of people and highly disappointed in society. This exhibition results from my two years at TCU and carries my work through many levels of thought and influence. Among the artists whose work that I have been exposed to; Maurizio Cattelan, Jeff Koons and Tony Matelli, are a few that have helped my work and thoughts develop. However, the work in my show confronts the same art world and pokes fun at the commercialism of art. The animals serve as props that make the show happen, each character having its own story that builds on the belief in its own personal value as an art object.

Ideas about value and importance have driven my work to a more refined state. Materials have become more important in the finished piece, giving a greater aesthetic value to the work. The animals do stand in for humans but they have their own narrative and predetermined value.



*HORSEKISSMONKEY* is an installation that deals with relationships and references the history of the animals. From their lives to the final state of smooth rock- like forms, the animals have become transformed from reality to a myth. The cement blobs have small cast elements of an animal that gives the form its identity. Scattered about, the animals resemble stone rubble, yet the softness and the anticipation of the kiss provides the installation with a warm narrative. Referencing architecture, the tall centered pedestal is unreachable and gives the animals a sort of goal.

Between the monkey with the mirror and the installation of *HORSEKISSMONKEY*, the hanging horse head is the other part of *Pretty Like That*, which serves as a sort of middle ground; the horse head hangs like meat. It is clean and smooth on one side while the other side is rough; one eye is frozen in a still gaze. The monkey with the mirror sits up high on an open cement and steel form staring into a mirror. Ostensibly narcissistic, she really is self-conscious and wants to be like the other animals in *HORSEKISSMONKEY*.

The three monkeys in the exhibition are confined by the art world (“the white cube” defined by Brian O’Doherty). This system of value creates their environment and a setting for their story. The viewer’s imagination and his or her ability to conceive the value of animals endows their existence with mythic proportions. There is the oppressed *Aye Pobre Animal*, who is pinned down and partially asleep, dreaming of his future. Then there is *Fuck Monkey* who gets all the cake, the passion of rebellion and pleasure. This monkey is the only one who is free to do as he pleases, choosing to fuck the system of value and become a hero in his own land. Finally there is *JMONK*, who is both tortured and glorified in his crucifixion on a cross. This monkey represents many ideals in the search for meaning and value, becoming

both myth and legend. This piece is the bridge between the story and the souvenir, the icon that affirms the reality of the real.

The souvenir is driven by its own myth. Like many things it is usually cheaply made but greatly valued because of its relationship to the narrator of the story. The animal is easily appropriated into the narrative trappings of the souvenir, accepting its own representation and assigned value without question. Although the object itself is worthless, the souvenir is easily assigned a story and a value. Like most things in the world, souvenirs are so inflated by nostalgia that they don't really make any sense unless you buy into the narrative. Yet the collection of souvenirs is reassuring and eventually forms our life's narrative. This is not necessarily negative at all. It defines our life in terms of belief and experience while reminding us of memories and pieces of our life wrapped up into an object with no greater value than any other.

The piece that summarizes the show is *Alterego*, a shelf of souvenirs consisting of casts from a plastic Jesus night light whose faces are concealed by different masks. Unable to confront its own identity, the masked form becomes something else. As it was cast, the Jesus figure is almost resurrected or reincarnated as yet another souvenir. As the masked figures are potentially transformed into animals, which suggests an alternative identity, their rebellious nature is emphasized. They might represent a new meaning, a new belief, memory, or joke; or even an alternative form of a souvenir. The materials (cement, wax, metal, plastic and paper) contribute to the signification of the animal, suggesting multiple, contradictory interpretations. Rather than a prop or part of a narrative, *Alterego* offers the viewer the opportunity to determine its value as memorabilia. The artist's intent is to show the

possibility of future in the story, an alternative to the narrative that obscures its essential value, much like a border souvenir.

The mythic nature of the art world creates a story that is believed by a group of people. Regular people want to see art that relates to their life, dreams, beliefs and experiences. Familiar things are considered important, reminding them of their life and reality, holding value as materially significant objects. No matter if it is a prop, souvenir or icon the artwork has only the value that is assigned to it. This is neither good nor bad, it is just what it is. Art has become a narrative comparable to religion. By the story associated with it, it convinces us just like a prop or souvenir. The object is always assigned a value and becomes part of a narrative. I hope that my own work not only comments on the current state of the art world but also transcends the commodification and souvenir-status by which comparable works are conceived.

My work in this show, is intended to poke fun at the commercialization of art and provoke the idea of the value and meaning of the art object. Animals only serve as props in belief of their own existence and personal value as an art object; they serve the narrative. The ideas of value and importance have driven this work as the animals serve as surrogates giving a greater value to the narrative. Animals stand in for humans; art objects even iconic figures of their own narrative. Their predetermined value exists only in the form of the narrative, casting aside reality in the work. Reality is obscured in a sense. Masked by the narrative the animals exist as mostly recognizable materials that provide a sense of reality by association. An end to the narrative never really exists as the idea of consumerism extends the souvenir from the shelf to the state of memorabilia.

Plate one



*Fuck Monkey 2007*

Plate two



*Fuck Monkey (detail) 2007*

Plate three



*HORSEKISSMONKEY 2007*

Plate four



*HORSEKISSMONKEY (detail) 2007*

Plate five



*HORSEKISSMONKEY* (detail) 2007



Plate six



*Pretty Like That* 2007

Plate seven



*Pretty Like That* (detail) 2007

Plate eight



*Six Hares High 2007*

Plate nine



*Six Hares High (detail) 2007*



*Aye Pobre Animal* 2007

Plate eleven



*Aye Pobre Animal* (detail) 2007

Plate twelve



*JMONK 2007*

Plate thirteen



*JMONK 2007*



Plate fourteen



*Back Cheese 2007*

Plate fifteen



*Alterego 2007*

Plate sixteen



*Alterego (detail) 2007*

Plate seventeen



*Alterego (detail) 2007*

Plate eighteen



Installation view

Plate nineteen



Installation view

Plate twenty



Installation view

Vita  
Clayton Hurt

Education

- 2006 MFA Sculpture, (anticipated, 2007)  
Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas
- 2005 BFA Sculpture  
University of North Texas, Denton, Texas

Exhibitions

- 2007 *Monkey Penis: The Price of a Border Souvenir*, MFA Thesis Exhibition,  
Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas  
*Crosstalk*, Juror Rachael Cook, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth,  
Texas
- 2006 *12 x 12 x 12*, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas  
*12 x 12 x 12*, 9<sup>th</sup> Texas Sculpture Symposium, Junction, Texas  
*Surface*, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas (piece removed)  
*Feral Nature*, Curator Margret Meehan, University of Texas at Dallas,  
Richardson, Texas  
*Crosstalk*, Juror Noah Simblist, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth,  
Texas  
*Samuel's Heart* Silent Auction, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth,  
Texas
- 2005 *9X12*, Community Arts Center, Fort Worth, Texas  
*Plural*, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas  
*Offset.05*, (solo show, lecture), Tarrant County Community College North  
East Campus, North Richland Hills, Texas  
*What was it really?* BOMA (Barn of Modern Art), Denton Texas  
*Voertman's Annual Juried Exhibit*, University of North Texas Gallery,  
Denton, Texas  
*Offset*, (Jason Boone), University of North Texas Environmental Science  
Building, Denton, Texas

Work Experience

- 2007 Texas Christian University, Teaching Assistant for Beginning Sculpture, Fort  
Worth, Texas
- 2006 Fort Worth Modern, Temp Installation, Fort Worth Texas
- 2005 Texas Christian University, Sculpture Assistant, Fort Worth, Texas  
Green Mountain Studio, Harry Geffert and Linda Ridgway, assistant,  
Crowley, Texas
- 2004 University of North Texas, Sculpture Shop Assistant, Gallery Assistant,  
Denton Texas
- 2003 Francis Bagley, Artist Assistant, Dallas, Texas



## Abstract

The mythic nature of the art world creates a story that is believed by a group of people. Regular people want to see art that relates to their life, dreams, beliefs and experiences. Familiar things are considered important, reminding them of their life and reality, holding value as materially significant objects. No matter if it is a prop, souvenir or icon the artwork has only the value that is assigned to it. This is neither good nor bad, it is just what it is. Art has become a narrative comparable to religion. By the story associated with it, it convinces us just like a prop or souvenir. The object is always assigned a value and becomes part of a narrative. I hope that my own work not only comments on the current state of the art world but also transcends the commodification and souvenir-status by which comparable works are conceived. An end to the narrative never really exists as the idea of consumerism extends the souvenir from the shelf to the state of memorabilia.