

Inflatable Rapture

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by Lawrence Gise



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Masters of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition

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Art+Art History
Department

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When I saw Lawrence's previous work I knew he was, well different. His work was infused with a quirky off beat humor. Over his time here at UTA he fine-tuned and expanded that quirkiness, (as is evident in his work) and has taken it to 11. "Inflatable Rapture" encapsulates his major themes his visual style, his sense of humor, and his vision of the world

Through his studies here Lawrence worked both in comedy and delved in to video art, where he created several short works and has influenced his drama/comedy.

Lawrence works with a small crew and small cast and his films, which leads to a more intimate feeling, and his personality bursts through every frame.

Aside from his work Lawrence has been a dedicated and inspiring teacher. I know that he will have a great future as an artist and as a soul who develops quirky off beat artists.

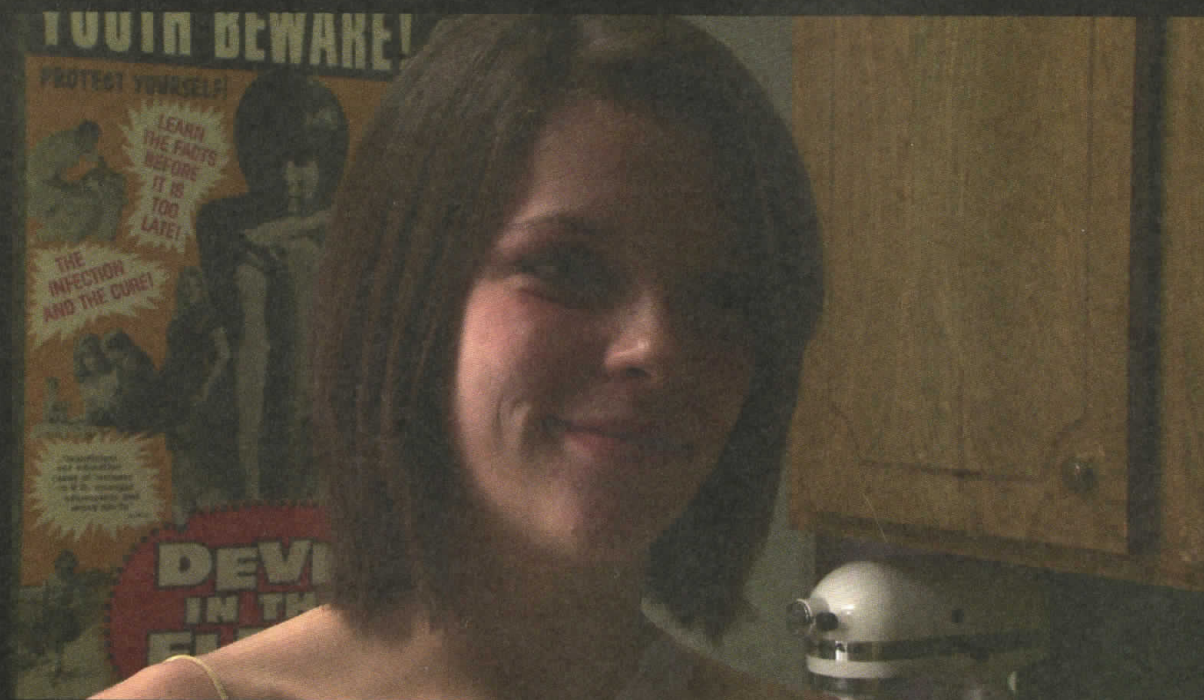
Bart Weiss
Spring 2011



The reason I am driven to pursue a life in the arts is simply a matter of fulfillment and purpose. I am not content to have other people's versions of reality shackled to me. Image and sound manipulation is a way to break out of these realities. Art is another way of seeing life and indulging the curiosity that comes with it. The expressive power and naked beauty of the moving image has always enthralled. Constructing a reality with words and images is my passion.

The things I am drawn to in my work are the prosaic routines and behaviors of every day life. Much narrative film focuses on extraordinary or improbable events; I find it much more fascinating to take the ordinary and re-arrange and magnify it in such a way that novel meanings and interpretations can come forth. I want to wring new insights from these banal rituals that are intertwined with the most basic needs. To my eyes, there is a vast reservoir of odd behavior that is glossed over under the guise of normalcy and it is worth investigating to better understand a person and their situation. "Normalcy" comes into question. I am engrossed by the way humans integrate into the version of reality presented by society's dominant ideological paradigm. Contemplating this, writing about it, setting it up, and recording it leads me to a better cognition of how we construct the parameters of our accepted realities.

I choose the content of my work according to its importance as a basic staple of society: food, religion, sex. Through my work I weave these fundamental needs into the fabric of the cultural norms bordering on the absurd. In video shorts, I have captured small chunks of life and put them together in a way that fits with my experiences of these staples. I aspire to take the moments of life and reconstruct them in a way that gives birth to a new mode of thought, a connection of elements not before realized, and a way to make the viewer a participant in the work and a participant in their life with the new ideas that come from these juxtapositions.



I use image and sound manipulation in a way to break out of hand-me down realities. The tools of the moving image can liberate us by creating new thought patterns and image associations. From these sprout new meanings, interpretations, and ultimately novel ways of experiencing and acting in the world. Mundane, prosaic events and perceived reality are far more fascinating to me than the improbable and spectacular events typically central to mainstream movies. Much narrative film focuses on extraordinary or improbable events; I find it much more fascinating to take the ordinary and investigate and cut-it up in such a way that novel meanings and interpretations can come forth. New insights rain down from these banal ceremonies, behaviors, and needs as they juxtapose in unusual combinations. I am engrossed by the way humans integrate into the version of reality presented by society's dominant ideological paradigm. In my life and art work I am influenced heavily by my environment and my interpretation of it. From what I can see this society and culture abdicate all its decision making powers to an authority thought to be higher and wiser. This inflicts an immediate inferiority complex. The more inferior you feel the more you subjugate yourself to authority. Fighting against this subjugation and inferiority is a central theme of my work.

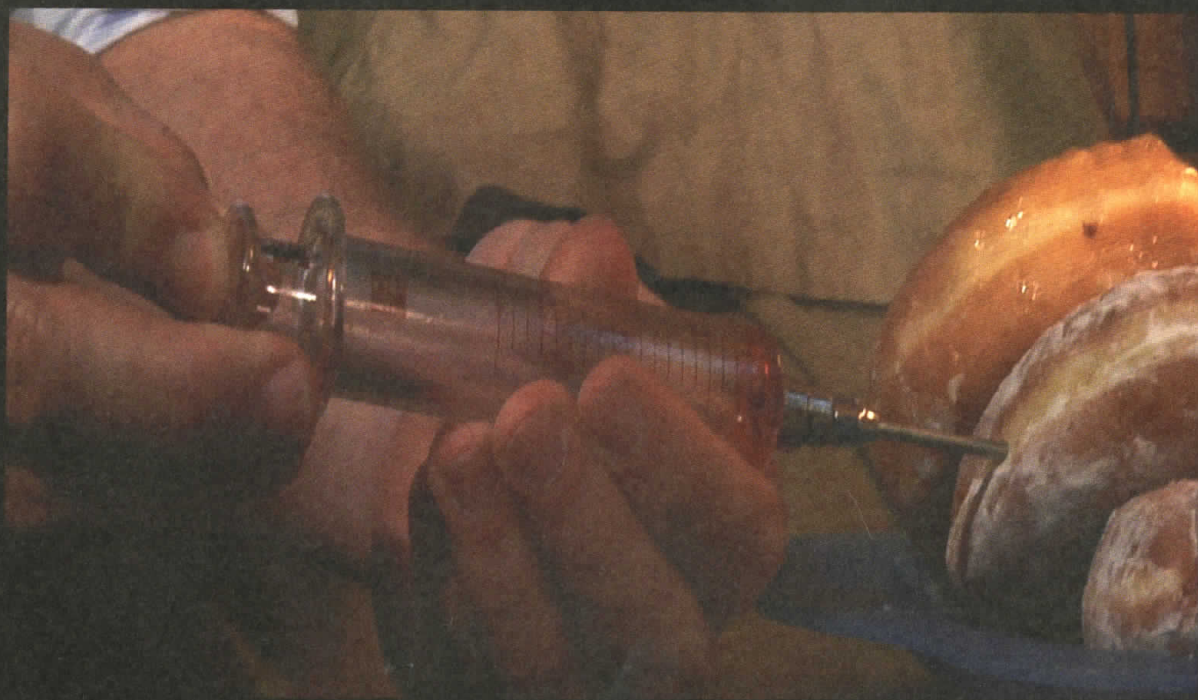
The topics I approach are food, sex, and religion. The attitude and approaches our society makes to these topics, acts and ideas has been and remains a fascinating well of material. Another facet of my art is to jolt the viewer out of their conditioned perception and



cognition through juxtaposition. Behavioral and psychological conditioning create a self-fulfilling expectation of "reality" that is ripe for reconsideration. My use of absurdity follows this too. The more absurdity I use, hopefully the more absurdity will be perceived during their regular waking reality. By the "absurd", I mean behavior we gauge as normal under the rules of our day to day operational consensus "reality".

This investigation into the valve of our social rules and taboos allows me to explore the value of those finding the absurdity in these rules and regulations, and the anxiety they bring, draws the viewer into my work. I want the viewer to be encouraged to look at and participate in their world with a renewed sense of perception after viewing.

The way I look at and construct art is heavily influence by my society, its sociology, and psychology. Part of what I portray is my interpretation of these features. The power dynamics and interaction between vicious social groups are issues I take into account when conceiving a story. Behaviorism, simple desire, and reward crop up in My First Time. The father craves sweets and his addiction gets direct reference in the dialogue. Food addiction represents pure example of behaviorism. Socially approved hunger and fulfillment are perfect examples of reward sanctioned by our society. Cleverly though, there is a negative view of personal worth by satisfying the cravings in society's last acceptable category of over-indulgence. This idea generates the image of the obese father and how the father satisfies himself with society's last acceptable, yet mildly frowned upon vice. Obesity is an obnoxious and impotent, but an oddly socially approved habit. It is also a capitalist ideal, the



unstoppable consumer.

Food addiction in this case is indulged in the same fashion as the stereo-type of the terminal drug addict, via a hypodermic syringe. So what is socially acceptable, detrimental food over-indulgence, I put on a level with the worst of socially disapproved illicit drug use. The point is to equate the two beyond the realm of legality. Both are damaging to health, the result of low self image, can be ruinous to quality of life, give a "high" of sorts, and imbue in the abuser a feeling of belonging. In the eyes of society, illegal drugs are execrable and righteously pursued rigorously across the globe. The USA's foreign policy is shaped by this pursuit, prisons are overflowing, and personal liberties have been crushed and vanquished by our national drug laws. However, obesity is the soft sweaty backbone of a huge portion of our economy. Fast food restaurants, convenience stores, and grocery stores shamelessly shovel out nutritiously deficient food by the ton. It's considered good business. The consumer gets what they want or to a degree what they are allowed to want. That is the thinking behind this imagery, to put the food addiction on the same level with the same intake as illicit drugs. I want the viewer to equate the two outside the bounds of our society's values, and then compare the two to see if one really deserves any more disdain than the other.

Central to My First Time is the choice of the two females as the explorative lovers. Not having a male in either of the female occupied lead roles removes the temptation to view this as a male conflict, i.e. the young man come to take his daughter away or the son as



metaphor for usurping the father's waning sexual prowess. By utilizing women in the lead roles I pit them against Western society's traditional dominant gender. The piece begins by a salacious intrusion by a male researcher into the sex life of one of the characters, Olivia. Disguised as pure disinterested science, the researcher probes her for details about her initial sexual experience with another person. This episode serves several purposes. That he asks for "every detail no matter how insignificant" gives away his own repressed urges that he is satisfying in the socially acceptable way, through scientific research. He represents another way of doing what the father does, achieving and reliving the pleasure anxiety thru society's prism of acceptable behaviors. The girls on the other hand, by having sex, smash through several social taboos: women expressing positive sexual desire, underage sex, and lesbian sex at that. By making their encounter a homosexual act, I was able to further my goal of pitting the socially acceptable against the taboo. The reason being to criticize the arbitrary nature of our social and cultural roles, this flashes back to the comparison between food addiction and drug addiction. One act results in the satiating of natural desires and curiosities, the girl's sex, and the other results in a potentially lethal accident as the bed collapses under the girth of the father.

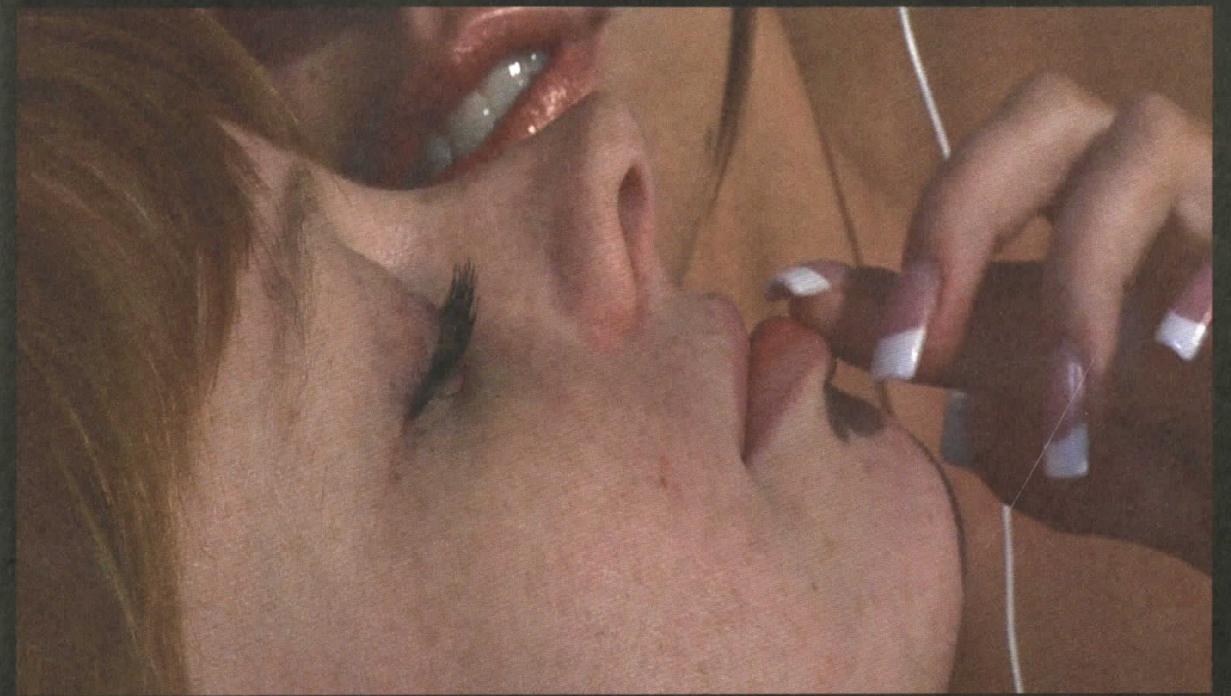
On one level I want to create an investigation rather than settle for bland criticisms. The juxtaposition creates the idea of opposition which leads to investigation. And it is not necessarily an "either or" question. I am not requiring the viewer to pick a side, I just want them confronted with something requiring thought rather than the unidirectional approach of



standard mainstream media. This follows my premise that I want to lead the viewer to investigation and evaluation of the culture, its values, and its arbitrary assemblage of right and wrong.

Sexual anxiety prevails throughout the forms, foundation, and structure of our society due to maladjustment of its sexual desires and urges. It then sublimates these primal urges into all sorts of odd behavior that then gets a gloss of normalcy that society can blandly agree rather than confront its discomfort over sex and sexuality. One of the products and behaviors is food and social rituals surrounding it. In over-consumption are a socially and culturally acceptable celebration, and expectation, and sublimation. So I juxtapose a natural exploration of sex with the socially and culturally far more acceptable and promoted food lust and over-consumption. So here are two primal desires, one accepted and one shunted. Both are essential physical and mental, yet one gets arbitrarily chosen over the other due to social and historical convention. Both involve anxiety over the body and body image. Both can engender massive amounts of insecurity.

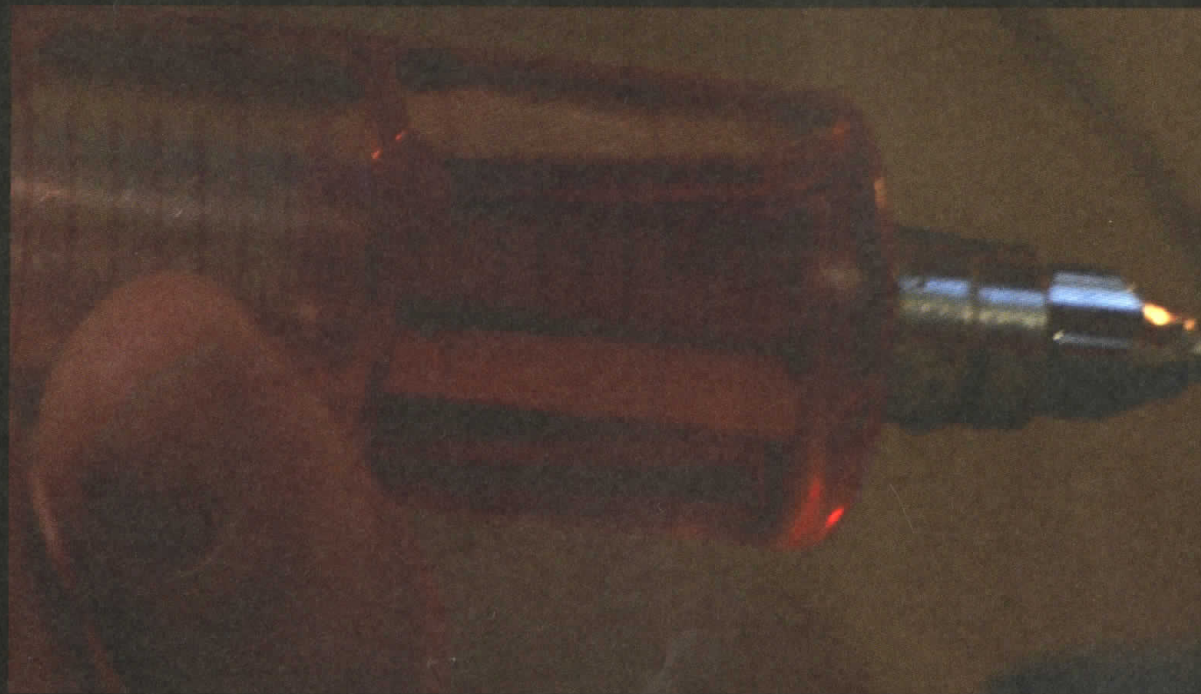
This piece compares and contrasts the two. Obviously the essential message I am portraying is that his food addiction is far more destructive than the ordinary and natural exploration of sexual desires. Instead of being open and up front with his donut lust, the necessarily an "either or" question. I am not requiring the viewer to pick a side, I just want them confronted with something requiring thought rather than the unidirectional approach of standard mainstream media. This follows my premise that I want to lead the viewer to



investigation and evaluation of the culture, its values, and its arbitrary assemblage of right and wrong.

This piece compares and contrasts the two. Obviously the essential message I am portraying is that his food addiction is far more destructive than the ordinary and natural exploration of sexual desires. Instead of being open and up front with his donut lust, the father sneaks around consuming his sticky delights in subterfuge. By hiding and denying his desires he gives himself task of compulsory over-consumption owing to the secretive nature of the way he indulges. He can not eat donuts at work under the critical eyes of peers, he can not bear to deal with his daughter's appraisal of his behavior, especially since the teen stereotype is immature sensory overindulgence, so he's forced to give himself the rapidest possible fix he can. Referencing the aforementioned stereotype of teen behavior is another reason I wrote the daughter as a teen. Pitting society's cherished image of the wizened parent against the equally socially denounced teen delinquent. Again what is considered delinquent is just a natural exploration of desire and the body.

One could argue that the reason hypodermic drug use garners the harshest revulsion comes from the needle penetrating the skin. This seems analogous to the sex act with its penetration and resultant waves of pleasure. Placing hypodermic injection right beside the sex scene creates another area of value evaluation for the viewer. The opportunity is for the viewer to decide which is more repugnant and deviant. Teen sex or grotesque gluttony manifested at its most extreme. Rendering the donut intake as an injection, then the viewer



recoils now having seen the two penetrative, pleasurable acts side by side.

Another, smaller elemental critique of modern society I am exploring in *My First Time* is the use of technology to keep us in touch with one another and our world. The girls are about to embark on what is to be their first sexual encounter and they can't be bothered to turn their phones off. Now this leads to the perverse benevolence of technology, it gives the look and idea of total connection beyond anything previously conceived by the human mind. However here, instead of increasing their connection it gives them a barrier from which to hide behind their desires. They both think they know the outcome of this rendezvous, but having messages to check gives them a way to appear busy and nonchalant in front of their desires, the illusion of distraction. The mp3 player also provides a dual function of a plot device and the invasiveness of technology intended to enhance all of life's moments. Here too, it provides an electronic wall for them to hide behind. Wearing the headphones gives them a way to disengage somewhat from the sex, if only to dial down the intensity to an agreeable level, and to effect a more self-centered concentration. While it pads the comfort level cushion and gives a level of disengagement, it also blocks out the unexpected arrival of the father and their entrapment under the bed. The absolute level of his pre-occupation with his confectionery addiction precludes him noticing two people two feet directly below him. Here we have two of society's sanctioned distractions contributing to an awkward disaster in the making.



The choice of having them use her father's bed is pure acting-out, in other words a detail of the taboo behavior tempting discovery. This is typical of childish attention getting behavior. If positive acts as construed by the parental promoted behavioral paradigm are not noticed and praised then negative ones will be asserted under the unspoken childhood truth that some attention, no matter how pejorative is better than none at all. The nature of Vivian's, the daughter, decision is not extraordinary at all. It does play into the overall structure of society's sanctioned actions and attitudes leading to the destruction of the happy family façade.

In the dénouement of all this is summed by Olivia finishing her interview in a sincerely glib way. She relates that Vivian suffered a punctured lung and got a pig's lung, the father successfully sued the donut company, and got liposuction and a pool with the litigation award. So we see the characters missed any chance to investigate the motivations behind the synchronicities that led to the cataclysm in the bedroom. In lieu of any significant evaluation of what happened and why, the entire set of circumstances is ameliorated by money, society's supreme justification and atonement. Again the socially approved thing washes away the agony caused by the other approved acts. Leaving the viewer wondering why the most uncomfortable thing, the sex, also the most natural thing, is the most disapproved socially. This is the way I want to drive them into the reconsideration of their social programming.



My love of the absurd receives much nourishment from the writings of William S. Burroughs. His use of juxtaposition and non-intuitive descriptive words in weaving a world of brutally and obscenely absurd human behavior remains a constant source of inspiration for me. By assaulting the reader with the unexpected, he creates a reality that unhinges the prosaic associations and expectations. Doing this forces the reader to adjust and evaluate their perceptual expectations accordingly and, thus, is forced to create new associations along those lines. He guides the reader's mental processes through this method and this has been heavily influential on me, through both the use of the absurd to create new meanings and the shock of the oddity of his imagery. I think his method forces the reader to form new mental connections in order to understand and absorb his point. Whether or not they find this method agreeable is insignificant, what is essential is that they are forced, cajoled, and seduced into a new area of associations. In this new area, a whole new reality emerges from learning to connect things not normally connected, to associate outside of standard categories, fishing in alien water with unfamiliar bait. The reader carries away this new wiring of cognitive circuitry and consequently is able to employ it as needed, should they want to. Once that break is achieved then it is up to the reader or viewer; the artist has been successful.

Inflatable Rapture reflects a similar style of critique with Christianity, sexual tension, patricide, and an assertion of pagan vitality. The movie is shot so the viewer adopts a



“peeping-tom” type of view of Victoria’s mundane daily existence, the daughter of a now invalid preacher. The narration comes from Victoria. Dosed with her mental space, the viewer sees her change out of her work clothes early on. Though she disrobes plainly, the viewer, through the camera’s eye, gets a full view of her. This feeds the portent of the story, which eventually one will find out that she is under clandestine observation. Many viewers reported discomfort at these shots which is exactly what is desired, discomfort in extreme. I want the viewer to feel the part of an unscrupulous, licentious, unctuous voyeur. This forces them to feel a kinship both with Victoria, who’s suffer through this, and paroxysms of revulsion at her still unknown violator. Rather than being prurient for the sake of prurience, this shots display the ordinary violation seen all over the internet and muckraking news. Something not so shocking now, but I thought effective to put the viewer in that place whether or not they want to be. I think they could more acutely feel the violation if they didn’t have a moral safety net telling them that what they were seeing would be ameliorated for their own good. Through the narration, the viewer gets clues to the father’s descent to his current state and explicitly Victoria’s feelings on her Christian exposure.

Some criticism of the narration centers around this harsh rant against Christianity and its easy comparison to the administrators of the Third Reich. Realism of the interior dialogue requires the abolishment of all social niceties since it’s an undiluted stream of thought. Though a person almost always errs on consideration instead of brutality, our interior monologue is a safe way to vent our angriest feelings without fear of reprisal. By



giving voice to the deepest well of vitriol, Victoria is able to maintain a protective mental screen around her. She may have to take care of her father and feel obligated to do so but she can rail against her situation vociferously to herself to keep a bit of herself or else be completely diluted by guilt and servitude. Everyone at one time or another has said they would “like to kill” somebody. These lines are just an expression of frustration and bitterness not necessarily the deep commentary on her character that some people read into it. While her father snores, she decides to take a moment to herself and masturbate. This is meant to be another difficult moment for the viewer. Far more than the passive undressing earlier, now she is actively engaged in and the progenitor of sexual activity. Though masturbation expresses a healthy sexual outlet, the weight of Christian prudishness and fear of the body and its desires polishes the discord of her current situation. Her narration recites the fact often recited by Christians that “Jesus sees all”. So here the viewer is wiggling in discomfort and distress watching a young woman masturbate, being assailed with Christian Iconography, and reminded that nothing hides from the Christian conception of God. The reason for this is to make the viewer confront the idea of how they feel or would feel with God watching their most intimate and sexually charged moments. The equation here equates god to a lascivious voyeur. This is indeed my intent. I want to explicitly act out the hypocrisy and failure of Christianity to suppress the sexual urge. The failure is a damnation of the power of the message, if it can not convince the follower to completely and utterly follow its sexual prohibitions then perhaps those prohibitions should be abandoned as



hypocrisy. If they cannot be abandoned then how does that reflect on the faith as a whole? What I want the viewer to draw from this is the implication of the earthly manifestations of the faith as blanket to cover your more lascivious desires. Also I want the viewer to see what Lester, the foul mouthed preacher sees.

Lester is the personification of the “holy roller” hypocrisy. He thanks the lord for everything good that happens and, by default, leaves everything unsavory up the failures of humans. Obviously much discussion could take place about how or why a supreme being would create beings with inherent failures, and have the omniscience to know fully the outcome of those failures. However the direct theme of my piece centers on the sexual urge, it being considered blasphemy except in very controlled situations, and how Lester manipulates the situation under that guise of religious benevolence torpedoed by his naked motivations laying out for the audience. He gets “permission” from the invalid father, Paul, to mortgage the house, Victoria’s house, to help fund a girl’s school. This displays his unctuousness. When Victoria learns of his hidden video tapping of her private moments, this then sheds new motivations on Lester’s philanthropy, his reading the bible to Paul. He uses this time to get closer to Victoria and torment her with his voluminous biblical ejaculations. The depth of his hypocrisy becomes clear and so does his perversity. He savors his position as God’s earthly messenger and uses that as a cloth to wipe away the sins of his lust.

The pagan element I worked into it reveals itself as the narrative unfolds. Victoria and Alex, Lester’s ersatz acolyte, are both obviously female. They both chaff under the



dominate religion, lead by men and whose god is a personification of maleness. This is the classic, and in fact only, Christian system. It excludes women from the beginning do to a sexually inappropriate act that is only alluded through the story of Eden and the fact Eve let a snake into her garden. The control system is the standard one Western civilization has been laboring under since the ascension of Christianity. Male dominated and controlled society. Women are excluded on the assumption of the uncontrollability of their sexual desires. Of course, this sexual depravity clouds their judgment, makes them second class citizens, and renders them a liability that must be tightly controlled to prevent the entire dissolution of society into sticky stew of effete libidinous indulgence. It was this thinking that resulted in the insatiable suppression of pagan religions by the Christian church. Christian came to prominence historically speaking by the ruthless suppression of the indigenous religions. These pagan religions usually gave women the same prominence and spiritual importance as men and featured female deities as the personification of wholesome, salubrious nature of the physical and metaphysical worlds. The Christian church suppressed sexuality and consequently women, who were viewed as the source of "impure" sexual urges. Here we have two women seeking to overthrow their Christian oppressors in an unconscious reversal of pagan history.

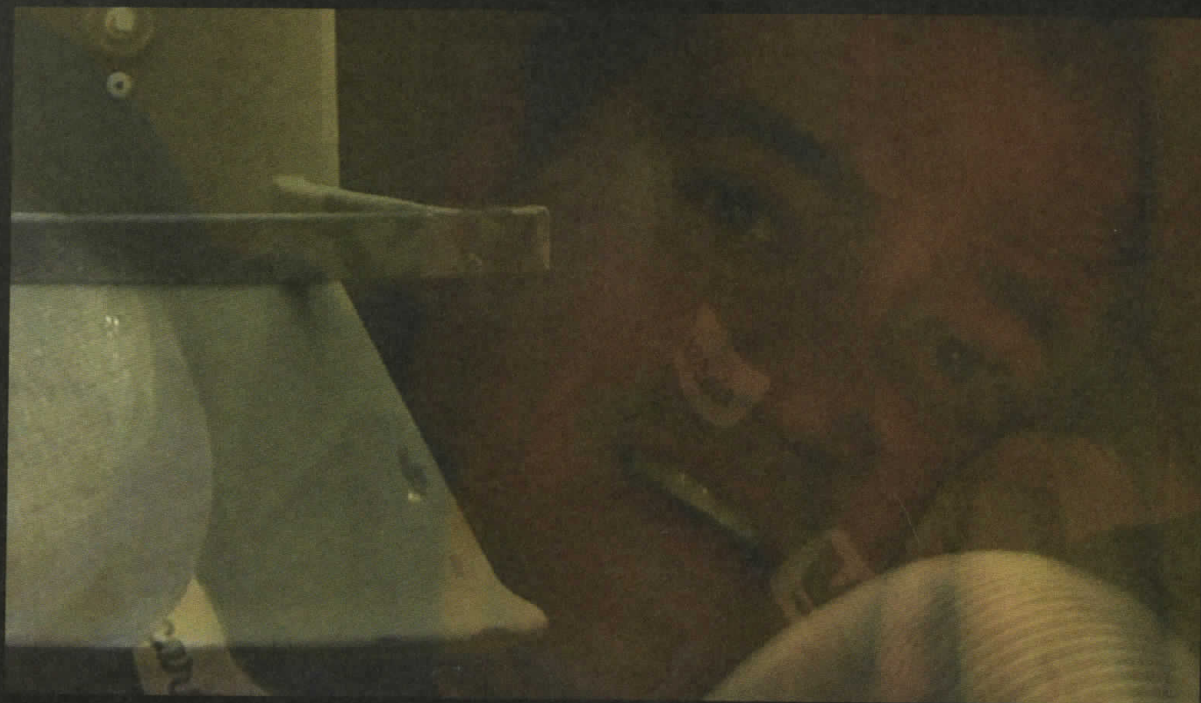
Frequently in the background an anti-sex propaganda poster, exhorting the dangers of youthful curiosity and exploration, frames the protagonists. This reinforces the idea of the Christian society's conflict with sex.



The two main male characters, Paul and Lester, are stand-ins for the Christian belief system. Lester proselytizes and Paul is the conspicuously absent spiritual leader. As the father, Paul represents the concept of God and Jesus as well as being Victoria's adoptive father. These two go hand in hand, as Jesus is metaphorically represented as the father to humanity. Paul, as the father, offers not direct advice, guidance, or sets any example whatsoever except sucking away all of Victoria's vitality. Her waking hours are spent taking care of him or going to work at a mind numbing job in order to financially support him as well. He fulfills the role of the god who is never there, but demands all the work and attention and anxiety of his supplicants. He is a visible drain on Victoria and yet gives nothing. Whatever his original incarnation, now he is a virus devouring her life. As the allegory goes, Lester fills in for the true believer and twists the system to his own ends. This is a major point of criticism of Christianity, that some believers merely and simply use it to get what they want regardless of whether or not it contravenes the tenets of their belief system.

The cheap religious iconography is meant to critique the capitalist nature of Christianity. The more you buy the more you believe.

My experimental video artwork has more directly explored paranoia and banality. "Man in a Box" features a man in a box rambling on at length about events from his past. The viewer is left to decide if they are accurate events, exaggerations, or fabrications. His

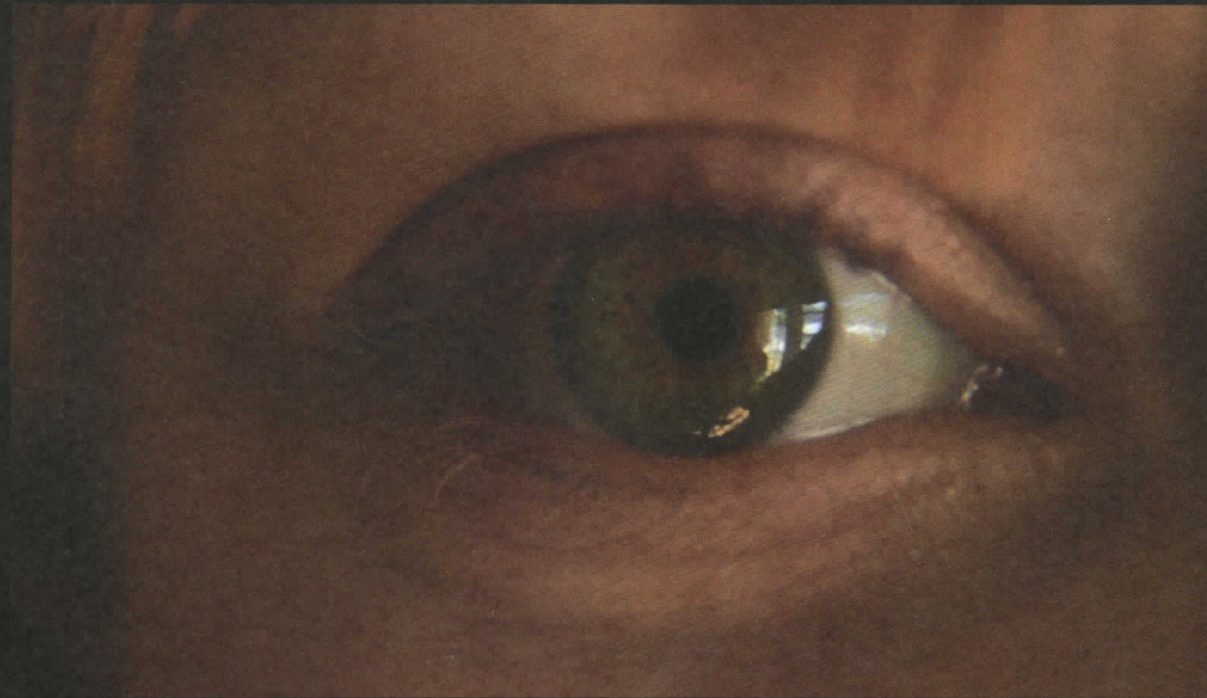


tense speech pattern alternates with periods of staring and high pitched whining. The purpose is to put the viewer into his cramped paranoid mental space. This is an unsolicited, unfiltered tour of what is on his mind. I shot this to take a break from the constraints of narrative cinema. My next video art piece gives the viewer a barely edited audio track of a young man trying desperately to get a date with a young woman. His desperation keeps the conversation going as we all have done when trying to woo someone to our favor. The visuals of the young woman in lingerie provide a colorful contrast to her polite disinterest. This provides a glimpse of the mental fantasy space versus the reality. The deflating male sex doll equates to the loss of the fantasy. It provides a wonderful contrast to the vital sexual image of a young woman clad in lingerie. Exactly the image one would not expect the hopelessness of the ersatz sexuality. An over endowed rubber doll and a disinterested woman dolled up for sex. It is the mismatching of human communication and desire. Failure to perform on the fantasy level, gives the viewer a table on which to see how our society's substituting of titillating image and sexual accessories does not alleviate the failure of the young man or the disinterest of the young woman. Boredom and banality triumph and all the sex surrogates can not rectify that. The expectation of wonderful moments in life can often be a let down. These images are that story, the hackneyed plague of meaninglessness that rumbles through life like a barely functioning car that can not be turned off for fear that it will never start again. Layering images with meaning, then juxtaposing those images distills a set of tense speech pattern alternates with periods of staring and high pitched



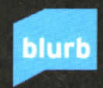
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Layering images with meaning, then juxtaposing those images distills a set of meanings and interpretations. Image and how it is conveyed, through lighting, framing,



camera movement, forms the second layer of raw material for my work. The first layer comes from an idea, concept, or theory or any multiple of those that I reach through writing and contemplation. Cinematic work is exacting because the rigorousness of planning squeezes out all possibilities of accidents. I do look for and appreciate fortunate accidents, but the majority of work on film flows from intent. This is how I intend my work to appear and the meaning I want to be derived from my work. Though the message may not always be new or profound, the methods and ideas that generate them are the indispensable core of art. The value of art comes from enlarging our perception by combining elements in a novel way that ultimately expands our definitions of the world and its possibilities. This is what I aspire to in my art.





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