Peregrinus of Parium

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Controlling Mechanisms

In the History of Early Christianity, an essay written by Frederick Engels, the beloved Peregrinus of Parium used religion as a tool to convince uneducated proletariat workers to donate money to save their souls from “damnation”. Because of his dishonest thievery, Peregrinus “lived a splendid life at the expense of the community”. Today we are witnessing a similar exploitation of human ignorance and the environments we live in.

The industrial revolution was the catalyst for a destructive and irreverent force against nature. Whether cognizant or inept to the visible or hidden damages caused by its path, a trend of societal commitment and confidence in these industries has led to a paradox, where the industries capitalize off of their own destruction. Today we are living through a catastrophe of outdated technologies that continue to destroy this earth. We are witnessing a result of these (Peregrinus-like) industries capitalizing on a human dependence to these resources. Radiological devices, inorganic chemicals, inert plastics, and fossil fuels are industries that are responsible for many deaths, diseases, pollutions, and wars.

Throughout history various cultures have used illustrative iconography to represent religious, cultural, and historical events. My works similarly are illustrative iconographic forms that convey and reflect a current history. These works are not only a close observation of our distance from nature, but a depiction of our ability to exploit and destroy it.

Visual Context:

The illustrative and iconographic images that I create are made with a particular visual language that references animal drawings from a variety of cultural disciplines. The visual formats that influence my works are traditional Japanese linen painting, Pre-Renaissance drawings on paper, Children's book illustrations, and Comic books. I am examining where these illustrative formats merge and exploring methods to visually slur the ideas of innocence.
and experience, where childhood fantasy converges with ominous realism. I am closely observing how juvenile humor (e.g. puke and poop jokes) juxtaposes a serious representation of current cultural and social events. I am primarily investigating environmental pollution and its relationship to death and disease. I am purposefully using biodegradable materials to contextually support these iconographic images. I feel that it is challenging, in this day and age, to make artwork that does not pollute and destroy the earth, and is able to decompose as a part of the earth, while simultaneously socially commenting on pollution and its effects on the environment.

The Archival Vessel:

The importance of using organic and earthen materials is not only a decision to create a healthy way of making art, or an environmentally conscious way of making art, but a spiritually sound way of making art. I have intentionally made these works of art biodegradable like my body. This biodegradable material is a revolt to the idea of “immortality” through objects and our desire for an eternal existence. I am investigating where commercially driven products contribute to this desire for this false sense of immortality within chemically produced archival materials and exploring organic and earthen materials that will decompose with the earth. I am trying to express that the body is separate from our spirit and the object is separate from our emotion. This demonstrates that the human spirit does not lay in the object itself, but rather an understanding of the object. Owning something does not always mean we understand it, but rather understanding it is owning it.

Contemporary capitalistic culture uses mechanisms to control and manipulate human desire; the desire for material objects and possessions. This culture places an emphasis on the “object”, and desiring the “object”, for its ability to stimulate the body. Stimulation of the body is not of importance, in my mind, but rather the human spirit and our ability to make
others feel. My work is a means to express my sincere desire for the human spirit to persevere
materialism by creating images that transcend beyond the “object”. The materials I use, like
my body, are a biodegradable vessel that carries an image that represents a soul. The image
behaves like numbers and words, it acts as a tool to relay complex ideas, observations, and
emotions that convey the human spirit. These ideas are my living experience.

A Breathe of Fresh Air:

I consider myself a printmaker by trade. I received a BFA with a concentration in
Printmaking in 1998 from James Madison University. My undergraduate career and the
beginning of my graduate career were spent making art with materials that my body can no
longer tolerate. In my first year of graduate school, I became ill with sensitivity to most
gaseous chemicals and particulate materials. This includes almost every single commercial
art material except for watercolors, gouache, tempera, inks, and linseed or safflower-based oil
paints.

During my one year hiatus from graduate school I spent a great deal of time
researching painting and drawing materials. I suppose in the middle of my sickness, I realized
that wearing a heavy duty respirator to do things is not necessarily the most comfortable way
to work, and if this damage was permanent than I would have to figure out an alternative to
continue making works of art. As a result of this chemical sensitivity and inability to use some
materials, I began using acrylics. It seemed like the most obvious “non-toxic” material. I
spent a while using strictly very low odor acrylics. I recognized shortly after, that the acrylic
materials were beginning to control me instead of me controlling the material. The acrylic
pigments retained a very artificial quality which was an aesthetic quality that I felt
uncomfortable about, especially since I began making works about sickness and its
relationship to our environment. These artificial paints also support the plastic and chemical industries that pollute the environment, which seemed rather hypocritical since I was making work about environmental pollutants. These acrylic paints are so chemically produced that I could not create them myself or permanently rid of them if I tried. This seemed to defy a personal and ethical belief system. At this time, I turned to an exploration of another world of materials that allow me to breathe, as well as using a material that retained a new life similar to the cellular structure of plants and animals. My goal was to make all my paints with organic and earthen materials, so that I could be somewhat self-sufficient and responsible towards the environment.

My journey began with items from the fridge and pantry. I began boiling down berries, beets, turmeric, and purple cabbage, to createreds, yellows, and blues. These sources worked very well as inks on paper, but with very little light fastness under Ultra-Violet Rays. The turmeric turned a brownish-yellow; the beets turned a pale pink, and the cabbage a pale gray blue. The berries were the only fairly stable pigment, but I had problems with the material remaining too sticky and having an extended drying time. So I continued to investigate other organic plant materials. I did a little research, and found that walnuts were very stable pigment and produced a beautiful brown ink. So I boiled some fresh cracked walnut rinds and shells that I found in the woods, and came up with a very lightfast and stable material.

After my success with the walnuts I started to investigate flowers as a possible source for pigments. In researching flower pigments I stumbled across a company that sold ground plant pigments (with little to no additives). Some of them were sugar-based plant pigments that would bind with water (for fabric dying), and some plant pigments were oil-binding (for oil painting). So I ordered a couple small containers of the water-binding plant pigments and began experimenting with its capabilities. I had to use a dust mask to mix most of these, as I
am still sensitive to particulates. I also started working primarily on cotton rag paper at this
time, for two reasons. First is that cotton by-products do not create pollutants, and do not
require as many additives as wood pulp. Secondly I realized that finding places to store works
of art was becoming rather difficult as the years passed by. So my works became primarily
large ink drawings at this time in my experimentation. I found that this way of making works
was rather limiting as it has a faster drying time and it was making my work become more
linear, and I was trying to move away from that quality as seen in my earlier works. So I then
ordered some oil-binding pigments and incorporated drawing on paper with oil paint. I
started using expeller pressed safflower oil as my paint thinner and brush cleaner. I found a
solvent-free wall paint that contains titanium dioxide, talc (asbestos free), cellulose, corn
starch, and water as a paint to coat the paper to create a gesso-like surface to work on. This
surface was very versatile as I could use water-based material to stain the surface and oil-
based material to adhere to the surface. At this time, I also found another oil paint company
that primarily deals with traditional earthen based pigments. They only use cold-pressed
linseed oil as their base for their paints with no fillers. So at this time I found a successful way
to draw and paint on paper with organic plant pigments and earthen materials. Finding
particular companies to buy from has made it easier to purchase some supplies that are stable
and lightfast. This has also sped up the process of my work production, as I was investing
more time in earlier experiments making the paints and less time using the paints. Eventually I
would like to become more self-sufficient in my material making process, but graduate school
has limited my experimentation time as there are particular deadlines. I foresee myself
continuing this material investigation and having my hand as a more integral part of the
material making process in the future.