

## Curator's Statement

### ***Good Artists Steal***

Fosdick-Nelson Gallery, School of Art & Design, Alfred University

*Good artists steal; bad artists borrow.*

-or-

*Good artists borrow; great artists steal.*

-Both loosely attributed to Pablo Picasso

This is an interesting time for appropriation in art. With such rich precedents as Sherrie Levine's work, which questions originality and authorship, and with recent lawsuits involving Shepard Fairey and Richard Prince distinguishing (and re-distinguishing) between copyright infringement and intentional artistic transformation, the strategy is part of an ongoing discourse. Unlike pop stars who re-use things for simple effect or homage (ie. Kanye West using Evel Knievel's stunt suit in a video—would Picasso say he borrowed?), appropriation artists draw attention to their activity: the process of taking.

In this exhibition, the artists go beyond simple lifting of source imagery and language; *they make them their own*. While each employs a different set of strategies, they all underscore the importance and relevance of cultural icons. In an era when almost everything is recycled and repeated without our noticing, these appropriators compel us to recognize how we are affected by, and find meaning through, the mediated images and words we view.

Susan Fang constructs complexly layered videos and collages, thrusting together seemingly disparate sources. She associates her process to language formation:

*"I moved to the US when I was 4, and began to study English mostly by repeating and mimicking dialogue from popular TV, films and other media... but whereas my first language seemed to have developed with me, English felt more constructed, as a result my work is very much about identities constructed using references to film and pop culture... my work tries to discuss what I can't find words for, because, in essence, I have no words of my own, but rather a collection of references that help me in gauging my own existence."*

Daniel Finch's abstraction refers to the dot pattern of a television screen. His

paintings show fragmented versions of Tony Hawk, BMX rider Mike Dominguez, Bruce Lee and Sir Edmund Hillary (who was first to summit Mt. Everest, and whom Finch sought to emulate after seeing footage of him twenty years after this feat). By reinterpreting a distorted set of images, mediated through technology, he seeks to reclaim and redeem them. His work examines his own attention to these televised heroic images and how they have affected his identity formation.

*"It is no accident that the majority of my subject matter is taken from modern archetypal characters and events, whether historic or mythical: King Kong, Evel Knievel, Bruce Lee, etc. They were, for better or worse, powerful symbols for a young boy growing up in the wake of the sexual revolution, in the post-Vietnam 70's."*

Hooper Turner's work is based on fashion ads and catalogs. Through faithful replication of these images, he questions both the desire that these images instill in eager consumers as well as his own attention to them.

*"I have to make paintings of the images that fascinate me and of the many objects I can't afford. By painting them, spending many hours looking and remaking, I learn the image, explore the details, and hope to see the pictures with new eyes. The paintings become larger than the source and much more materially present... The best of my paintings... force both artist and viewer to confront our desires. Rather than anxiously judge them, we learn more about ourselves."*

What strikes me as particularly compelling in all of the works presented here is how each artist has internalized found imagery and manifested it through material investigations into such successful and personally meaningful works. They've shaped works that go well beyond quoting; they have harnessed images and language to redefine how we consider identity (individual and cultural), desire and language. These are important investigations and transformations.

Dale Inglett

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