Donkey fever: a general summary

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DONKEY FEVER: A GENERAL SUMMARY

by

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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor David Dunlap
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER’S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master’s thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Art at May 2014 graduation.

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CHAPTER I. DESCRIPTION

Donkey Fever (Asinus Febris) can affect varying cognitive functions and multiple body systems and produce a large range of symptoms. Not all patients with Donkey Fever will have all symptoms, and many of the symptoms are not specific to Donkey Fever, but can occur with other diseases as well.

It is unclear the exact time and place I contracted Donkey Fever. It is equally difficult to map the complex nature and diverse, disparate causes that have come to result in this infliction. Originally Donkey Fever was invented as a fictional disease and device to contextualize discussion about my shift in focus, away from painting. Its function was to help justify and present within the graduate painting program my heightened considerations toward a more self-sufficient lifestyle. The most important thing to me at the time I began to use the term “donkey fever” was a 12”x14” pole barn structure situated on the perimeter of my sisters 9 acres, just 12 miles south of Iowa City. This structure, a few months prior had been the weather shelter for two beautiful donkeys; Bernice and Alfalfa. The displacement of these humble creatures would create a vacancy and be one of the main contributing factors and impetus to setting a vision in motion. I was going to move into this structure affectionately called the “donkey barn”. Other influences and infortune driving forces behind this decision was a heavy sense of dread and panic I felt in response to my perception of the world and the current state of affairs regarding humanities future. In particular I was thinking about the destruction of our natural environment, depleting supply of resources, daily extinction of species, unsustainable lifestyles, current trends in food production and what I viewed to be a general lack of overall serious concern for society as a whole. This fever, although incubating within me for years, would manifest suddenly and with a powerful all-consuming intensity. I could not wait even one more day to begin my move towards a life closer to my value system and an attempt to remedy the contradictions I felt in respect to
the deep consequences of my current lifestyle. Something had to be done; even if it was equivalent to pissing in the ocean, regardless of a potential and utter failure, I was and am steadfast and wholehearted in my decision to move forward. These uncontrollable desires to make my ideas a reality lead me to share with others my hopes and dreams. The general response that I received was less than encouraging. Many made attempts to dissuade me with predictions of unforeseen, unbearable hardships, or my idea was met with straight befuddlement and a concern about my current mental stability. From these responses it is not difficult to see how I arrived at this idea that I had in fact contracted a disease. My mention of the Amish as present day examples of the kind of success I seek was also put under negative criticism. Arguments of fanaticisms or suspect religious positions distracted most from seeing the incredible achievements of these people. The Amish stand by as a great source of inspiration for me. They are a present day example of a culture that lives their birthright: sustaining and receiving sustenance from nature. The Amish are subjects of ridicule instead of praise, an island of a past, foreign sensibility surrounded by a massive culture decidedly irreverent to their values. This irreverence I rebel against, and in turn feel estranged by way of my dis-ease. I see in my culture ingratitude for the incredible abundance that surrounds us. We struggle to gauge what things are worth. My heart is troubled and horrified by the lack of humility demonstrated before the all-you-can-eat-buffet of fortune that has fallen into our laps, which could just as easily be the despair and destruction of unimaginable scenarios being played out in other parts of the world.

For the most part I am unaffected by the lack of understanding or support, and perhaps the doubt of others has only reinforced my resolve. This fever has only one cure: first hand empirical experience. I would like to show happiness and harmony in a lifestyle unadvertised in mass mediated culture. “Is this possible?” my fever so earnestly needs to know.
The conversation I intentional brought to the context of the graduate painting workshop was about the dilemma that all artists face: How do we make ends meet and find time to have a committed and productive art practice? How might we contribute to the overall good of our communities and society as a whole with the ideas we express?
CHAPTER II. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

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CHAPTER IV. DIAGNOSIS

Donkey Fever is diagnosed clinically based on symptoms, Rorschach tests, objective physical findings, wardrobe choices, or a history of possible exposures to donkeys.

Figure 25. Rorschach Test #1
Figure 26. Rorschach Test #2
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When you look upon these random patterns of ink on paper do you see the image or images of donkeys? If you have answered “yes” you may want to think about consulting your doctor, physician or medical health professional.
CHAPTER V. PREVENTION

It is only possible to express in words what words are capable of expressing. In my visual work I pay attention to the visual language of my materials. Forms take shape. These forms embody my thoughts, ideas and emotions. I am a form maker. It is through these forms that I facilitate an intimate and meaningful connection to my environment. This is how I come to know the world.

I have a tendency or habit of avoiding overly rationalized approaches. Instead I move intuitively and open myself to discovery, ill-conceived combinations, incertitude, unintentional marks, unconventionality, and flux. While working I choose to avoid thoughts that prohibit or slow forward movement. The space of forming or harmony between thought and action are given ultimate priority. All that does not reinforce this fluency is seen as suspect. I swim in an ocean of visual exploration, navigating the best I can, but I am more vulnerable than in control of the situation.

There is no specific, clear idea or ideas that I am trying to communicate to the viewer. This is not to say my work is devoid of substance or content, as I feel it to be full and close as possible to a representation of everything I know. Rather I am attempting to create meaning collectively with my audience. I seek a type of collaboration with the viewer; a collaboration that is diminished when my work is presented in a way that is too defined and less open to discovery. For this reason I attempt to deemphasize my role or authorship in the work and often show patterns of randomness or ordering principles closely connected to the natural world. I allow paint to behave like paint and wood to be celebrated as wood.

My art has strong similarities to the tradition of stand-up comedy, which reflects the humor of the times. Although I am not necessarily trying to make people laugh through my work, I am trying to put my finger on something that is shuffling and
dislocated. I see the true function of stand up comedy as catharsis, release and relief from built up emotions.

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