Freak beer (Part two - Do not resuscitate)

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Dedicated to the blissful mornings spent in a wash of sunlight, dancing with my cat Ozzy to Waylon Jennings and co --- here’s to good times!
“Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven”

John Milton
Paradise Lost
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Dionysus

La Regia

Billy Cho

R.I.P. Bexley
Dionysus, a deity from Ancient Greek mythology, is also known as the liberator or the breaker of chains. The coming of Dionysus is seen as a sign of freedom, but not to all. Dionysus appears where and when he is needed most. As consequence, Dionysus often encounters strife from those fearful of the rapture he embodies.

Looking at Art History, a magical thing can happen when art can communicate timelessly through the ages. Hans Holbein’s Two Ambassadors are as present as they ever were and Pieter Brueghel’s paintings feel as modern as a wild festival of buffoonery today. It was through this sentiment that Dionysus came to me as an inspiring and liberating force.

Hung over and wandering through the Yale Art Gallery, I was taking a respite between day one and day two of my cousin’s wedding festivities. The collection of painted Greek vases caught my eye. Bemused and entranced I slowly crawled through the exhibition until I found him, or did he find me?

On a pedestal there was a terracotta Kylix with a portrait of a wild-eyed man with a swirling beard and explosive hair. Our eyes locked and I felt a strange kinship as Dionysus stared back at me. Though removed from my time by centuries, he spoke to me. My work has encapsulated the culmination of a multitude of feelings, most notably academic boredom and a longing to transcend the present—and to these ends this feeling of liberation rang ever so true.
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FREAK BEER (Part Two – Do Not Resuscitate)

My work explores the seditious narrative, trivializing notions of high and lowbrow culture. It creates a sardonic, misconstrued inner world to mimic the workings of American cultural trends and tropes. My work is experimental, challenging traditional assumptions and relationships between art, technology and history. It questions the authenticity of preexisting narratives through play with the past to create moments beyond historical bounds that are provocative and full of energy. These moments are made by clashing pre-made stencils and spray paint with concise brushwork and loose gestures. I am inspired by the uncanny, the offhand, the informal and the sketch. This allows me to operate on a level that confuses and confounds the viewer’s logic in a subversive way.

The earliest thing I can remember drawing are skulls, or perhaps they have been the most lasting motif. A skull can be one of the basest things for a human to draw; self-referential to their self and their fate - a meditation on the space between the two. Foreboding, yet vulnerable - this is the space where I see my artwork existing.

Recently I have been inspired by the Dionysian Paradox - the dual nature of human existence, the tragic disposition symbolized by Dionysus to affirm life in all of its glories, yet understand and hear the unending drum of death and its violence. A circular existence of pleasure and pain, personified as a mad god for our mad world - asking the viewer to question their intellectual and emotional response to the subject matter. Dionysus emerges against the self-imposed chains of a repressive society to replenish life, yet still is neither true good nor evil, rather visceral and alive. At this threshold, I understood his importance of the delightful and frightful cycle of humanity. This inseparability between life and death inspired me in its resonance with my own interests to explore this ground. In understanding the past through the
present, and present through the past, reapproaching pre-existing topics to pursue new narratives, there is not a negation but a Dionysian relation to existence; to love fate. There is no future vision to purvey but rather to stand at the threshold of absurdity, violence and love and affirm life across this abyss.

“Freak Beer” is the title of my Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition, followed by the subtitle “Part Two, Do Not Resuscitate.” “Freak Beer” wasn’t always the contending title for my exhibition, and as the “Part Two” dictates—there was a preceding exhibition titled “Free Beer (Part One)”. The change from “Free” to “Freak” referred to the mutation that occurred between the two exhibitions. With very little changed in spelling, the meaning mutates, so does the vision. “Freak” characterizes as an unexpected event, feeling genuine to the spontaneous energy of the exhibition. Imbued with an orgiastic energy as a Dionysian climate clashes into our contemporary world with its paradoxical happiness and sadness, my exhibition embodied these tropes.

As with most of my artistic inspiration, “Free Beer” started out as a joke. Going to school at the University of Iowa, one is very aware of the dominant culture of Hawkeye Nation with the pervasive football tailgating at sport games. During these events, the size of the city swells and parking lots turn into open-air daytime parties. Despite the proximity from the Visual Arts Building to the sporting complexes, there is very little crossover in dialogue or interest between art students and these sport fans beyond sharing bathroom facilities. So how does one cross this boundary-- to attempt to create a truly intersectional event, to bring sports folks and art lovers together? I myself enjoy drinking beer, grilling food and being outside, yet I am an outsider to this culture, and I’m sure sports-fans like looking at art. To bridge this chasm my
friend and I decided, “FREE BEER!” would be the slogan to get the tail-gaiters inside the building where we can all mingle and sway to the rhythm of the art and the booze. “Free Beer”, was a nod to Dionysus, whereas beer became a stand in for wine as the lowest common denominator of alcoholic beverage.

I wondered how to bridge the context of present and past to make this a contemporaneous event, not just a dusty historicized trope. Ultimately, I found the necessary urgency when the “Free” mutated to “Freak”, and part two was conceived. “Free” implied a multitude and limitless libation with the possibility of agony or ecstasy depending on consumption, but there was another dynamic to this all, an inner space for these events to exist and I found myself looking for ways to illustrate and capture the excitement and frenetic energy of Dionysian rapture in the location of my time.

Like a lucid day dream, a blending between real and unreal occurs where lined notebook paper is reproduced, but scaled larger than human-size. Shifted in scale and tone to re-contextualize them to no longer absorb casual notes, doodles and to do lists that are jotted down on their lines, but to have a physicality that overpowers as roles are reversed. The notebook pages cascade down the wall, as if laws are uplifted. A massive amphora pours out liquid, absurd videos parade across the screen and moments of rapture are painted on stretched canvas to capture the spastic actions of revelry and danger. Truth is suspended and a new world is created.
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