

**PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS**

MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS

“A Gross Fascination”

May 2009

Christopher Michael Orapello

## Table of Contents

Introduction to Voyeurism	3
The Unknown World	6
The Modern Day Media	12
The Reality of the Human Condition	16
My Practice	18
My Work	20
My Materials	23
Bibliography	25

## **Introduction to Voyeurism**

The gross fascination of life is bred in the curiosity of animals. By their very nature, animals are curious creatures existing within a world filled with great and unusual things which seduce and allure them, sometimes resulting in benefit and other times not. The spider's web, the sweet smells of nature, and a mysterious den or burrow in the earth are all set to allure and tantalize the curious and inquisitive to an unknown fate. After all, the unknown is the greatest seducer of the natural world. Humans, who are essentially animals, are curious creatures unto themselves. We are animals who possess the added gift of intelligence and comprehension which permits us to not simply be curious about the world, ignorant to its greater reality, but to partake of the world unlike any other animal. In our recognition of the self and the body, a varied form of curiosity emerges; voyeurism, which is not rooted in ignorance or specifically sex, but instead is rooted in the pleasure of looking and observing from a vantage point of being separate to what is being observed. Voyeurism in itself exists more within the realm of personal entertainment and enjoyment than it does in fulfilling an instinctual desire to learn or survive. Unlike simple curiosity, which is fueled and founded upon ignorance and a desire to question and discover, voyeurism, by comparison, is infinitely different.

Rooted in fascination of the unknown and the forbidden, voyeurism is an enhanced version of curiosity which has grown to appeal to the lingering animalistic attributes of the human mind that harbor a taste for many things, some being a desire for the grotesque and the macabre. The irony of this fascination in western society, is that the grotesque and the macabre are expectedly regarded as being offensive, but at the same time, since they appeal to the primal side of humans, they are also found to be alluring and captivating to behold as

they are a reminder of physical life, existence, the fragility of the body, and individual mortality. Now a form of entertainment, the horror genre, whether in literature, music, theatre, or film, embraces these curiosities and issues of mortality and the human body, by appealing to this voyeuristic nature of society. In a more public and real sense, the media caters to this same society by showcasing tragedy and humankind's inhumanity to itself. In a personal and private sense, the sex industry entices the viewer by showing them what they want to see no matter the situation, practice, or sexual act. These three voyeuristic aspects of society -the horror genre, the media, and the sex industry- have all been blamed, at one time or another, for creating the 'problems' in western society. The irony in these accusations is that nothing could be further from the truth since all three are merely modernized versions of ancient social practices and enjoyments found in the history of humanity, but ones which could be equally conveyed and witnessed in the growth and development of a child indicating that this great "problem" is more a part of who and what we are as creatures than would be so easily recognized or admitted to. For even in the innocence of children we can find and witness a level of inherent cruelty towards others as well as an often sadistic enjoyment for the practice of cruelty. This seems to imply a very natural affinity for such actions and modes of thought on the part of being human.

The more helpless we are and the less we know, the more animal like we become. As children we do not possess the knowledge or ability to clean, bath, or dress ourselves and we have no knowledge or regard for our own bodily functions and activities. We uninhibitedly carry and live in our own urine or excrement until it begins to irritate our skin, and we have enough sense to relieve ourselves of this irritation, or our noticing parents take it upon themselves to clean us from our burden. As we age, some delight is taken in the torture and destruction of insects and in some cases small animals, for we know not of the pain and

sorrow of others, and instead we unthinkingly find the act of killing rather amusing. Perhaps at this age we find the sounds, the textures, and the sense of power to be enticing. It is during this time that television becomes a source of inspiration and a means to explore and experience the world for we know of no other real way. Though through television, we may at times catch the glimpse of a space shuttle burning up into dust along with its crew or the collapse of buildings as a result of a terrorist attack. At some point we realize the difference between reality and TV. At some point we learn when it's ok to laugh or when we should flinch in sympathy to let the world know that we notice and acknowledge the pain of others.

Voyeurism of the grotesque seems to exist somewhere between being able to laugh at something which isn't real and the developed numbness felt for tragedy and death experienced by those who have seen too much of it. It's like a strange middle ground which ventures into the private and intimate side of existence, but relating to it on a much more carnal level which could even be a blend of our animal side with the learned appreciation of a "civilized" being. In this sense voyeurism is a pleasure of wealthy societies who are educated enough to know better, but comfortable enough in their lifestyles to not care as much as they should. It is in this way that it then becomes a form of self absorption and even pride.

Why does this fascination for the grotesque and the macabre seem to be a part of who we are as a species and society? It seems to be an integral part of what we are and possibly a key to understanding ourselves and our existence in the world. This paper, like my work, has been an exploration of that gross fascination, a means to comment on it and a means to entrap and allure the viewer into a romance with the macabre.

## **The Unknown World**

An infant, born from darkness into light, has yet the ability to see. It has no knowledge of its surroundings or of those who look on. Like an infant, this is early humankind: ignorant and unknowing of the world. It is a world which breeds fear; one which is magnificent and huge, one in which anything exists.

In early human understanding, the world was at one time flat. If people were to sail far enough out into the seemingly endless ocean they would have risked falling off the edge of the world into a dark oblivion, never to be heard from again, but at the same time- to be sailing on the ocean meant risking the attack of all manner of creatures and monsters which dwelled beneath the surface of the sea who felt threatened by a passing ship or who happened to be hungry and had a taste for human flesh.

On land, when the sun set and the reality of night blanked the landscape, the many creatures of the land prowled the earth for human victims who were too bold to take caution from the unseeing darkness of the shadow-filled night. The haunting night was a land of infinite shadow and unknown terror, one which did not permit the eyes, but instead allowed the mind to see into its mystical depths, one which revealed a host of creatures and demons all waiting to devour the careless traveler. Tales were told to warn against such encounters and how those could protect themselves against the great unknown. Garlic and a cross were sure ways to fend against a vampire, while silver and wolfs bane were the materials of choice against werewolves. Ghost and phantoms were also feared as *the most common ghost stories involve the return from the dead of someone who has left something undead or undone* (Carroll, pg. 98). How often do all these beings still inhabit closets, cupboards, and basements in the homes of today?

Ignorance inspired fear of the unknown and through fear grew the need to find answers and explanations. The embodiment of the unknown or “known” world grew into general occultism and religion for both offered either an explanation of the unknown world or a means to deal with and control it. As understanding grew, what was once regarded as being fearful and unknown became amusing in the light of knowledge and truth. But even with growing knowledge, fear simply moved its focus to the edge of knowledge to where darkness continued to dwell. The areas of the unknown continued to taunt the acknowledgement of possibilities and demons and hell and all the beings of the night receded into the shadows waiting and trusting in human fascination of the unknown.

*The imagery of death and evil could be a metaphor for art itself- the uncontrollable desire to look* (Gavin, 7). Human acknowledgement of God and the fear of his wrath manifested into the horrific religious imagery of hell and in the damnation of man which, *connects (us) to one of our most primal desires: voyeurism* (Gavin, 7). Images such as “Hell” or *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch were meant to instill fear into nonbelievers and to instill faith in parishioners. These images depicted scenes of hellish torture, human disembowelment, souls of people being devoured by gruesome monsters and even Satan himself whom all dwelled in the depths of the Earth. Creatures designed to punish and eternally torture those who disobeyed the word and laws of God, and so having been sent to hell as a reminder of their erroneous ways while alive on earth. Such imagery was one of the earliest forms of horror and a demonstration of the voyeuristic tendencies of humankind to gaze upon the pain of others who could not follow the path of the good and righteous, which is similar to *the notion of God spying on mankind from the sky (above) may strike us as unpleasant, but like Bosch’s imagery, such a thought appeared as a salutary deterrent to sin* (Gibson, Pg. 37).

Horrific imagery wasn't limited to the religious influences of the times, but could be found in an array of subjects and images throughout the history of art. Francesco Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1819), Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781), Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819), and David's *Death of Marat* (1792) all depict horrific scenes of a various non-religious nature. Goya depicts a monstrous father (Saturn) tearing his limp child apart in the grips of his mouth as we can see parts of the child that have already been consumed by his uncaring empty-eyed father. In *The Nightmare* we have a depiction of "old hag syndrome" or what is more commonly referred to today as sleep paralysis. The phenomenon depicted by Fuseli was indeed a frightening occurrence and anyone looking upon the image that had experienced such a thing would indeed be frightened as would anyone else during the 1700s. The other two images depict historic yet humanistic scenes of horror of "man's inhumanity to man" which bore meaning to those who these incidents directly or indirectly effected as they reveal scenes of human torment and death. This allure and fascination continues to this day by onlookers of these images or in similar works by modern artists like Frances Bacon, or even observed in similar moments that can be witnessed in today's world. All suggesting that, "hell is no longer simply a destination after death, it is within the landscape and the architecture, within our own bodies, within communities, within technology. Hell is humanity itself" (Gavin, 6).

Art was then, as it is now, merely a reflection and a depiction of the world in which it was formed. The three images referenced in the previous paragraph were reactions to occurrences and events in the world. Horror, torment and death were certainly not shunned realities of life for there is a comparable history of accepted torture and public executions throughout western culture. Hangings and other such town events were viewed no different

than the sports of today as they were a huge social event and even a source of enjoyment and entertainment for the masses of gawking citizens.

The amount of complexity and creativity that went into torture and execution almost rivaled the talent and creativity of the making of art; so much as to indicate that it was an art unto itself and a joy of the executioner as techniques varied to such a degree as to imply discovering new ways of implementing torture were as simple as walking through a kitchen or work shop to see what could be used next on a prisoner. Clamps, knives, hammers, saws, etc. were all used in one form or another to induce new and creative ways of testing the limits of human constitution.

If the reality of public executions were too much for one to witness, they still had the option of experiencing a more controlled form of horror found and utilized in plays and literature where imagination could be stretched and viewers could enter into a new world full of new and fantastic possibilities. A world where death, murder, ghosts and monsters exist as a separate reality, one which could be experienced and enjoyed without containing any actual threat or notion of guilt to the viewer or reader in regards to delving into the dark and mysterious world of the unknown.

At times when depictions of horror and the unknown seemingly stayed in the realm of fiction are also found episodes where nothing could be further from the truth. For example, such an occurrence can be found in the writings of 20<sup>th</sup> century authors as H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King. Both author's work may at times allude to fantasy, and yet at other times are firmly rooted in extremely realistic scenarios creating an almost naturalistic form of horror bent upon situational fears like in King's novel *Cujo* where a rapid dog keeps a mother and child trapped in a car that has an empty gas tank or his other novel *Misery* which relates to an

obsessed female fan who kidnaps her favorite author and tortures him into writing a story for her that brings back a beloved character of hers whom the author killed off in one of his recent stories. Both stories relate to the human condition, vulnerability, and cater to voyeurism as we explore two very realistic 'what if' scenarios. To create his stories, King utilizes conceptual formulas to convey and create a particular effect in his stories, *for example, terror is fear + imagination; horror is fear + graphic portrayal; and revulsion is fear + gross, graphic portrayal* (Carroll, pg.218). The formulas in themselves not only allow King to create the effect he desires, but they illustrate an understanding of perspective and knowledge of the human condition.

In the case of H.P. Lovecraft, what was once thought of as simple fiction has at times began to manifest in the real world as potentially very real things. For example, his famous Necronomicon, an alleged fictional magickal grimoire created in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which has been featured and referenced in several stories and movies, has since become widely available to purchase and use, and has even been disputed among the occult and magickal communities as to its validity. The other is 'Cthulhu', first mentioned in Call of the Cthulhu, a story originally written in 1926 and first published in Weird Tales magazine February 1928, is an ancient demi-god who sleeps at the bottom of the ocean in R'lyeh, his sunken city (S. Latitude 47° 9', W. Longitude 126° 43'), waiting for the time when the stars are right for him to return. Upon his return, he will devour humanity and be worshiped by his followers who he will also honorably devour. Oddly enough, the coordinates indicated in this 'fictional' story relate directly to a modern occurrence found in the ocean in an approximate similar location as revealed by Lovecraft 80 years ago. Discovered in 1997, the occurrence is an audio sample of two sounds ('Bloop' and 'Slow Down') which are unable to be identified. 'Slow Down' was a sound recorded on May 19, 1997, in the Equatorial Pacific ocean by the

U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and 'Bloop' is the name given to an ultra-low frequency underwater sound detected by the same U.S administration several times during the summer of 1997; the source of both sounds remain unknown to this day. Since the sounds originated near the location of the fictional sunken city of R'lyeh, they have been linked to Cthulhu by Lovecraft fans emphasizing the recurrent fascination with horror and the reality of the unknown that continues to this day and how truth is often stranger than fiction.

Regardless of our current knowledge of the world, the looming elements of horror, within the reality of the unknown, continue to fascinate and perpetuate a sense of allure and curiosity in the minds of humans. An occurrence which reveals that we will always be afraid of the dark, fascinated with death, and willing to watch others experience an unknown fate that we ourselves refuse to tempt or face. In a modern sense these voyeuristic fascinations have simply transformed and aimed their interests on newer areas of life such as the media and the entertainment industry, which in themselves were made for such tendencies and interests.

## **The Modern Day Media**

Whatever the form, whether it is published, broadcasted, televised, or found online, the media provides society with a direct line into today's world. Whether it describes and reveals the recent discoveries in science and medicine, it's reporting of local occurrences and events, or provides entertainment, the role of media in the world has always been a direct reflection of humanity. As a result, it has always catered to humanity's voyeuristic nature because the media needs the attention and approval from society to survive and the easiest means to achieve both is to give society what entices its curiosity and interest. As so put by Frances Gavin, "the media has always been preoccupied with shocking imagery and violent narrative" (6), which are two qualities which have always been known to cater to the voyeuristic nature of humans. This has been evident for hundreds of years and continues to be a fruitful source for the media even in this day and age. The direct problem of this is that such imagery and content create desensitization towards the subjects and situations shown to society by the media which in turn associates them with entertainment based media thereby blurring the reality of what is being witnessed. Such a scenario enables less of an emotional attachment to form on the part of the viewer than was felt at a public execution hundreds of years ago; because the wide reach and exposure of the media emphasizes the already exaggerated distance between the viewer and what is being viewed, creating a perceived false reality.

This misperception of reality is thereby further enhanced by such individuals who take advantage of the media by creating false situations disguised as real ones, for example Orson Welles' famous Halloween broadcast of "War of the World" played off the blurred reality that the radio could create in the mind of the unsuspecting audience. This effect then has the

potential of making everything real or everything fake in the mind of the viewer as a result of this blurring of reality. In conjunction with an already present disassociation, why wouldn't everything, regardless of its level of brutality or inhumanity, become a form of voyeuristic entertainment? To further illustrate the effect of perception and interpretation that media can have on the viewer, famous silent film comedian Charlie Chaplin, in his directorial genius, knew that by filming someone getting hurt from afar made the scene impersonal and more entertaining and the same apparently goes for life as well. This form of comedy can also be observed in the famous early 20<sup>th</sup> century slapstick comedy of The Three Stooges and referred to in German as "Schadenfreude," which is the malicious pleasure of taking pleasure in the suffering of another. Schadenfreude is sadistic in nature, but more voyeuristic in practice.

This tendency to view trauma and potential trauma as entertainment can be noticed in other areas of society such as in the practice of rubbernecking at crime and car accident scenes. The unimaginable physics needed to destroy a vehicle, create the allure of what such physics would do to a fragile human body. This fascination for physical and procedural occurrences involving the human body is evident in the success of numerous television shows on crime for example, *Autopsy with Dr. Baden*, a forensic pathologist, discusses the investigations of murders and crimes that he had been involved with. During an episode of *Autopsy* one is sure to see images of murder victims in various conditions and states of decay which not only reveal "forbidden imagery," but allude to "forbidden acts" as well. Often the imagery in the show is similar to Duchamp's installation, *Étant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas), located in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where we are shown a murdered individual, often nude, that has been carelessly left in a remote location, often a field or a place in the woods. Though in Duchamp's installation, the body viewed through the keyhole is not mutilated, but is still

observed laying in a careless manner within a field and we are not given the pleasure of knowing the true state of the scene. Is Duchamp's woman dead or unconscious? Is she enjoying herself or is she a helpless victim in who we the viewer are exploiting by our curiosity as we gaze at her naked limp form through an old taunting keyhole?

This notion of the forbidden is one of the key elements of voyeurism. The idea of looking upon something which isn't common or permitted is the allure within the enjoyment and practice of voyeurism. This is also the reason behind the viewing of snuff films, which are real; horror movies, which are depicted creations; and the often fascination with serial killers and the "murderabilia" that they leave behind which can be found, auctioned, and obtained online. Though the difference between snuff films and the fascination with serial killers is that by watching the snuff film, the viewer is participating in the act of killing and fulfilling the purpose of the film, by witnessing the murder of a stranger, as so further supported by Gavin who says that "by looking at violence or horror we become complicit in its creation, part of the cause" (7), while being fascinated with serial killers is a glorification of what they did and not entirely an act of participation of the part of the fanatic. However, an interest and enjoyment with horror movies is different entirely as the viewer is both participating and glorifying the content and primary fear component of the film, but at the same time is not a part of a real situation, but instead is participating in a horrific and often brutal fantasy.

The fantasy and escapism of horror which has existed since its formation as a genre, ties directly into the functions and effects of the media, while catering to a form of harmless voyeurism; harmless in that what is being observed is not actually occurring at anyone's actual expense. The twist happens when, through horror movies, the viewer forms an appreciation and enjoyment for terror, torture, pain and the suffering of strangers. This effect further blurs

the reality of such horrific imagery and activity by making it entertainment and enabling the viewer to find a level of comfort and amusement within the depicted forbidden act; which in turn, if the act were real, such imagery and activity found in typical horror movies would not be so easily accepted and regarded as amusing, but instead would be feared and not enjoyed.

Pornography, an alternate form of film media, offers the opposite situation in its form of visual imagery and reality; for in an adult movie, we see real people committing real acts meant to be pleasurable and enjoyable to watch and in some cases enjoyable to perform on the part of the actors. In these films, we typically find sex in its usual fashion, an act not unfamiliar to a majority of the film's viewers. These films not only cater to our voyeuristic tendencies, but they also cater to our obsession with sex, our own bodies and the bodies of others. Yet despite the level of honesty and conveyed reality found in the imagery in adult movies, the movies themselves and the content they contain are still regarded as being forbidden in that they are often watched in privacy and not usually discussed in public conversation.

Pornography, like horror, is voyeuristic in nature as they can both be enjoyed and contain elements of the forbidden regardless of their seeming obvious contextual differences. Despite the differences in their imagery they both relate to two aspects of humanity which not only define what we are, but also allude to how we are.

## **The Reality of the Human Condition**

The result of voyeurism and human fascination with the grotesque is directly connected to the human body, the human condition, and to what we are as creatures. Humans are essentially gross animals. We defecate, urinate, eat, feel pain and pleasure, and secrete fluids and substances. If we have an infection, we ooze substances; we smell and are smelled by others. All the elements which are common for all humans, i.e. bodily functions, are often the elements which we hide from the world. They are those which are shameful and so are hidden from others, are dealt with in special rooms in private and are also often covered up by perfumes and deodorants. We bathe to fight and remove those aspects of our humanity and animal nature from our bodies because they are seen as dirty, shameful, and wrong. And in such past instances where such bodily elements and situations could not be so simply, removed (birth defects, deformities, deforming conditions, etc.) they were instead hidden away from the world, shunned, used for purposes of entertainment (carnivals), or studied as medical curiosities for the betterment of science all of which on a basic level is merely a formal form of voyeurism.

Such observances can still be found today in the form of museums (The Mutter Museum, College of Physicians in Philadelphia, PA), as well as in televised documentaries which reveal and portray unusual modern medical conditions and situations which act as both scientific spotlighting as well as a form of entertainment. Both being a new version of the carnival freak show as despite the honest intentions of the filmmakers and the television industry to offer insight into the life of someone

who was born without a face; someone whose skin tears and breaks like tissue paper; someone whose legs have grown to such a degree that they dwarf the rest of the individual's body and make movement nearly impossible; or someone who is morbidly obese and who cannot get out of bed without the use of a crane; such televised documentaries can also easily become entertainment to those who choose to scoff and laugh at someone who lives with a particular malady or disability. Even with those individuals who sympathize with such conditions, the foreign reality evident in the condition still captures and fascinates them on some level. I myself at one time flinched when a pair of enlarged deformed hands reached within my field of vision to give me the drink I had ordered from a beautiful girl who was working behind the counter, not knowing that they were her hands, and that despite her beauty, her hands did not fit the expectations I had for the rest of her appearance.

Aside from the physical manifestations of the body whether they are functionally related, acquired, or born with, the body is how we as humans relate to and interact with the world. We experience the world with and through the body. It is what allows us to touch and be touched, to cause and feel pain, it dictates our limitations and our abilities, it tells us when it has been injured and when it has had enough. It is also the reason why we are mortal, as due to age or illness the body can no longer support or carry life.

## **My Practice**

As an artist, I work with materials and the human body as substance, it is material; and within it I can find an assortment of textures, shapes, liquids, and colors all which can be easily used or translated into a sculpture or painting. The mythology and social associations found within the materials and substances of body also provide a host of messages and meanings to the willing artist. Often what we know of and experience, in the world has a direct bodily association. Love is typically associated with the heart and intellect with the brain. The idea of the soul has been attributed to the heart, brain, and body as a whole. One being emotionally tough is explained as being thick skinned; while being naive, dumb, or stubborn is said to be thickheaded. Human practices and habits also have direct bodily correspondents, for example; smoking relates to the lungs and heart because of how it affects those organs similar to how the consumption of alcohol relates to the liver as both activities have existing social stigmas attached to them already.

In regards to the materials of the body, blood has the greatest catalog of purposes, myths and associations. In essence blood is a living liquid as it is compiled of cells and plasma, which circulate through the body supplying it with oxygen. Blood even changes color depending upon whether or not it is oxygenated (vibrant red) or non-oxygenated (dark red). Blood has been regarded as being 'life itself' as one's existence is so dependent on its quality and ability to function. Blood has also been used in social contexts in regards to family bloodlines and with the knowledge of science we know that blood contains our DNA which is the blueprint of our bodily

makeup. Blood has also been associated with illness and the curing of illness back when bloodletting was thought of as a means for relieving illness and in modern times even been associated with the transfer of disease (HIV/AIDS). As a substance blood is a liquid of color which can be used like paint as it can be used to make marks upon a surface which has also been known to stain fabric or surface areas. After all, stains in themselves are memories or allusions to the past one which exists without mind. They are an indication that at some point something occurred to cause the stain to exist.

The reality behind the human condition is that we have all experienced similar things as a result of our bodies and can relate to the experiences of another as a result of our bodily understanding and identification. Regardless of this common element, there continues to be shame and secrecy surrounding the body in regards to personal, physical, and social situations. The shame we feel for ourselves as creatures influenced by religious oppression and punishment in religious and social histories. The overall taboo nature and fascination of the body fuels voyeurism, the horror genre, and the porn industry as they exemplify aspects of the body and the reality of being human in ways that are not typically regarded as being acceptable or accessible and do so by often creating a fantasy or distorting reality to enable one to observe the forbidden whether we actually or secretly enjoy looking from our place in the world.

## **My Work**

My work is meant to stimulate human fascination with the grotesque and is contingent upon what makes up that fascination and what has led to its development. Issues that relate to the unknown, the forbidden, the media, the horror genre, the human body and the conditions that result in their many complex forms and outlets; have all played a part in establishing a voyeuristic fascination for the grotesque which is evident in everyday life. All these elements have already been discussed so far and are the reason for their inclusion in this paper as they are the foundation for my methods and reasons as an artist. They are a direct result of humanity as an intelligent mortal social animal who recognizes their own abilities, limitations, fallacies, restrictions, and physical essence as a creature of the earth.

My art has always been a conversation between me, the materials, and the outcome. As of late, with my exploration of physical materials and application techniques, I have been suggesting bodily elements in the form of matter, fluids and substances with the intent to create a document, an implied history of which the resulting art work was a by-product. I sought to incorporate bodily horror and play off of the common human fascination with tragedy, violence, war, death, scandal, and the allure of the gross and the suggestion of murder, torture, suicide, disease, tragedy, human abuse, bodily functions and bodily fluids as these are elements which are all rooted in the substance and vulnerability of the human body found within human existence.

The human body has always played a part in my work, but its role has never been so vital and evident as it has been in my most recent work. In a sense my approaches to art making have not necessarily changed, but are being better realized. What has changed was my motivation, which before was simply to make art, has now finally formed into a full-on exploration of humanities voyeuristic fascination for the grotesque, a tradition which I was surprised to discover began in the 1960s with the Vienna Actionists. Although, unlike associated Vienna Actionist Hermann Nitsch, my “performances” simply consisted of me just working on a piece rather than scheduling and orchestrating an event. Though planning and process are always present in my methods much like in the practices of any other artist, they do not compare to Nitsch’s elaborate performances, but similar to Nitsch’s works my paintings, like his, are both evidence and the result of what occurred during the creation process, whichever form it took.

Though all art is voyeuristic, due to the very nature of its need to be observed by the public to fulfill its function, my working intention is more voyeuristic due to it being more rooted and contingent on the reaction of the viewer than in the artwork itself. The reaction of the viewer plays an important role in the existence, effectiveness, and function of the work as art. It is not essential for the work to be pleasing to look at, but is only expected to allure and disgust the viewer on some level; any aesthetic appreciation which occurs in the work can be referred to as a contradiction to the implied intent, but one which offers insight into the nature of the piece as well as the viewer. The beauty that can be obtained from my work is similar

to the aesthetic found in abstract expressionist imagery with its paint application and techniques. Though the enjoyment I get as an artist is in the conflict inherent in the viewer when they want to look at red paint smeared or running down the surface of a work, which the viewer can't help to think of the red paint as blood thereby touching a more primal level in the artwork and ultimately in the viewer as well. If they possess the ability to see the paint as blood and the marks it creates as emblems of violence then they in turn become an accomplice to my art and the violence inherent in it. Thereby committing the act in their mind and relating to it on a personal level.

The rawness of the work is meant to relate to the rawness of human emotion and how its apparent sudden creation is not unlike the momentary nature of any emotional reaction or decision which often negates logic or rational human thought. In a contradictory sense the creation of one of my works is not necessarily as momentary as they would appear, but instead are the result of days of preparation and planning which culminate into a momentary expression captured and frozen in collage of acrylic medium, paint and varnish. The expediency contained in the final moments of creation conveys the expediency of the implied act found in the art.

## **My Materials**

The materials which I use are selected to reflect and allude to the human body, and they are often sides of the body which are not normally seen in daily life. The red that I use to represent blood (Cadmium Red Deep) is a red that I have used for many years and have not simply selected it for a purpose in my recent work. Such can be said of many of the colors that I currently use in my recent work and how they immediately translate into what I have been recently exploring, that being the human body. On a practical level the adhesive ability inherent in the acrylic paint has enabled me to utilize the paint as both an element of color and a material used as a binding agent to create collage with a created piece of art.

The backing, whether it is a white canvas or some other material, is selected to either compliment or contrast the piece as a whole which to me is viewed as a thing rather than simply an image. The surface and backing is just as valuable in important as what happened to it or what may be built on the face of it.

On a higher level the work is meant to persuade the viewer into self reflection as a person and animal by making them acknowledge the fragility of the body, and the limitations of their mortal existence. The primary idea of the work transcends the work itself thereby making the execution not as demanding, providing the desired effect is achieved and the appearance of the work need not conform to traditional compositional aesthetics and design methods, because forbidden acts are not conforming in nature and neither should art that depicts such acts. The final realization of this journey can come to many endings. For some it may end with

knowledge of the self and an honest yet skeptical view of life and the world. Others may find humor in what I do and recognize the often inherent irony in tragedy. There will even be those who see my artistic endeavors as merely childhood fears and a looming by product of some remaining teenage angst, however this response may simply be an expression of denial on the part of the viewer. For anyone to scoff at the suggestion of death, torture, suicide, murder, rape, and any similar allusion conceived and found in my work is a poor response, because this would denote a lack of realization or understanding of these situations and actions. Just as it is a lacking attempt on the part of the viewer to suggest that what I am doing is a confession or result of my own mental instability, which would be an assumption of the viewer because I have never been diagnosed with such a malady. Yet others would simply ask why I would even do such work when I could do landscapes, interiors, still-lives, or figural imagery? My reply is because none of that imagery reveals a side of humanity, but only creates further illusion much like a television program and only permits the viewer to look and escape their world without personalizing what they are looking at or even learning from it. The canvas of the artist is often viewed as a porthole into the artist's world allowing the viewer to visit as they are so inclined. I would rather have my art invade the mind and world of the viewer than have it sit idly by on a wall waiting for them to visit. The world itself is not as kind or as passive and so neither should art be.

## **Bibliography:**

- Blood: Art, Power, Politics and Pathology. Edited by James Bradburne. Prestel. 2001
- Carroll, Noel. The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart. New York: Routledge. 1990
- Gavin, Frances. Hell Bound: New Gothic Art. Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2008
- Gibson, Walter S. Hieronymus Bosch. Praeger Publishing. 1973
- Hermann Nitsch. by Heinz Cibulka, Wolfgang Denk, Wieland Schmied, and Hermann Nitsch. Hatje Cantz Verlag. 2007
- Witkin, Joel-Peter. Gods of Earth and Heaven. Twelvetree Press, 1994
- Writings of the Vienna Actionists. by Brus, Nuehl, Nitsch, Schwarzkogler. London: Atlas Press. 1999
- The Undead and Philosophy: Chicken Soup for the Soulless. Edited by Richard Greene and K. Silem Mohammad. Carus Publishing Company. 2006