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Sugarcoated Pill: Ben Morey's Artistic Healing

By Rachel Galvin

Lollipop colors, rounded edged, curved lines, Ben Morey reveals the healing power of child-like innocence through his imagery. He takes a fresh look at the idea of pleasure, sensuality remolded, squeezed through a tube and transformed into a technicolor alien version of what it once was. Sexual organs become personalities taking form and function. The crazed juxtaposition of opposite elements and sexual connotations is reminiscent of a Terry Gilliam poster. The energy of Morey's pieces is magnetic, pulling viewers into the image, making the more profane imagery much more palatable and taking the profane and making it playful.

Morey said, "I feel like childhood is a state of freedom that is gradually paved over with anxieties, responsibilities, becoming jaded etc. and when you can reverse that, even for a little while, the results can only be positive."

The playground of seemingly gelatinous bulbous images symbolizes the healing power of innocence, but also dips into themes of self-medication and distrust of conservative ways of viewing gender roles and sexuality. He titillates with the idea of losing ourselves in seduction. It is all broadcast as if each new life form is introducing itself upon a game show stage, ready to be assessed by the masses with cheesy display.

Morey spent his formative years trying to make sense of the world. Art became a medium of understanding, a way to communicate. But he struggled with how to balance "pure expression and functional design."

"The combination of and oscillation between the two in my work forced me to constantly find new ways to deliver a better conceptual, visual and experiential impact, and that mission eventually evolved into my personal and professional focus," he said.

He found himself gravitating to artists who create new worlds that viewers could find themselves lost in, artists like Pedro Almodóvar, Björk, Olafur Eliaison, Carsten Höller, Radiohead, Louise Bourgeois and David Altmejd.

His family was always supportive of his ambitions, contacting an art teacher to work with him after elementary school and encouraging him to go to an art magnet junior and high school, and, eventually, the Maryland Institute College of Art where he received his Bachelor's of Fine Art. His uncle worked with oil paints, stained glass and wood and his mother had him help her with arts and crafts around the house.

Today, he works as the Senior Academic Resource Support Specialist for Broward College's North Campus Fine Arts Department, assists Davie's Young At Art Museum as a design consultant and is the Creative Director for the museum's contemporary arts collective Bedlam Lorenz Assembly.

Besides at the Young at Art Museum, his artwork has also been seen at The Art and Culture Center of Hollywood, The Projects of FAT Village and at 1310 Gallery.

He won the South Florida Cultural Consortium's \$15,000 prize in 2014 based on a span of projects he had been working on since his graduation from college in 2010.

“I presented it in a progression from flat, 2D work, moving into sculpture and then into the interactive installations,” he said, adding that he used everything from ink on paper to oil and acrylic to spray enamels on various items. He even incorporated “untraditional media” like sound, websites and video into some pieces.

With his prize money, he hopes to possibly travel to Europe and invest it.

“I’m investing in things that are going to help me be more productive in the long run (new computer, studio equipment, materials etc).”

His work has certainly changed over time, said Morey, widening in scope and adding more interactive elements.

His most recent artwork, he feels, is more direct with its message, steering more toward the confrontational. Several pieces, which he classifies as portraits, include photographs of rubber mannequin heads surrounded by passive objects like tools, pills or sex toys. The characterization is that of either doctor or patient. This, he said, is an extension of an installation called 'RX,' which was shown at 1310 Gallery in 2011.

He added, “I’m hoping to get further into a series that started with a drawing that is currently on view at the Young at Art Museum in Davie involving sculptures of my childhood home in various states of being tented for fumigation (dealing with the idea of childhood as a state of purity, reclaiming that etc.).”

He tells would-be artists to get involved in the art community, suggesting they attend workshops, lectures, exhibition openings, screenings, performances, etc.

“There are so many free and accessible events in Broward and Miami where you’re going to be surrounded by like-minded people, as well as the people who are invested in the local art scene. Meeting them can only be a positive first step toward perhaps working with them in the future,” he said, adding, “Have a good website or online space where you can document your work.”

In order for his creative juices to start flowing, Morey makes sure to have all his tools in place – shelves filled with colored paint markers, keyboards, mat cutter, toys and noisemakers, tape and packing materials, as well as plenty of reference materials: books, catalogues and more. Every wall in the apartment outside of his “studio” space is for his private collection of art filled with work by artists he and his roommate respect.

He hopes that viewers will respect his work and find it to be healing.

“It’s easy to focus on the negatives in life and to sweep them under the rug with the help of distractions (TV, food, sex, drugs, work, etc.). I realize that is a lot to hope for but art and music heals me on a daily basis, so my goal is to make work that might be capable do the same for others one day.”

When not creating art, this Dania Beach resident loves going to museums and galleries, spending times with friends and looking for new concerts to attend.

For more information on Ben Morey, visit <http://benmorey.com>.