The State of Eclaires



K. Hortonlike chocolate

The State of Eclaires is Horton's ongoing work where common chocolate bars are purchased from the local variety stores of his neighborhood and hauled back to the studio where he melts them down in a stainless steel pot and hotplate pouring them into prefabricated molds that will produce figurine horses approximately the size of one whole chocolate bar.

"It took some experimentation. I kept getting the size of horse wrong by making a mold and then seeking out a bar about that size. Or I would start with the bar and go and look for horses about that size. And things

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where getting a little too expensive, and taking too long until I realized that I should be thinking more in equivalents than approximations. That's when I began using water to displace the horses. I had to get an accurate read of their volumes - from there I had an indication of what gram size of chocolate bar to look for. This would also work in reverse. The volume of the object is the amount of space it takes up and for the scale I'm working on I had a decent equivalent margin."

K Horton

The melting down of a chocolate bar seems harmless enough; however it undoes a great deal more than their shape. Precision labor goes into the making of the bars as we know them. The chocolate bar's distinct shape, ingredients, and often brand impression come to symbolize a type and those types have created an enduring expectation. KitKat tastes like this, while Mr Big tastes like that. We know this, in the same way we have come to know what to expect from an apple. Whereas the apple is a natural product and identity, the chocolate bar is not; it is entirely manufactured. A great deal of effort goes into that kind of identity, also known as product recognition. Companies do this by seeking out ways of getting universal values into their marketing mix. Food and drink companies concentrate on attracting an audience and getting them to consider their product as the only drink, chocolate bar or snack range that really satisfies their needs. The producer aims to connect consumer patterns and refine these into an understandable image/ reputation. A company has only one chance of impressing a customer through a first class product and so once a customer is satisfied with the product and goes for a repeat purchase brand recognition results. The consumer now recognizes the product with its name and attributes. He associates the product with a set of assets and qualities and this creates brand equity for the product. A chocolate bar's identity being manufactured in this way, suffers greatly from any distortion. How could we possibly recognize a KitKat if we were presented only with it's material constituents? What senses could we rely on to tell us what this pile of chocolate and wafer are? It is akin to the Wax Argument constructed by Rene Descartes. He considers a piece of wax: his senses inform him that it has certain characteristics, such as shape, texture, size, color, smell, and so forth. However, when he brings the wax towards a flame, these characteristics change completely. However, it seems that it is still the same thing: it is still a piece of wax, even though the data of the senses inform him that all of its characteristics are different. Therefore, in order properly to grasp the nature of the wax, he cannot use the senses: he must use his mind. Descartes concludes: *"Thus what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind."* This departure from perception has already occurred in the manufactured, chocolate bar which has created an arbitrary but reproduced shape already a departure from actual chocolate which is amenable to any shape conceivable. What you see with your own eyes is the liquefied wax that has cooled after the experiment. It already contains the departure. It is this pre-determination that Horton's work challenges. As if you could return to the liquid moment and intervene. Yet at the same time he pushes the limit of our attention by again forcing the chocolate into another betraying form, the form of a figurine horse. The title given to all these horses is 'Next'; implying that this is merely the next shape and that others exist adjacent to this; in other words, a continuing act. Beyond brand-recognition there is what Horton's act achieves; the recognition of potential.

by Kristan Horton





Left: Kristan Horton
Next, 1999

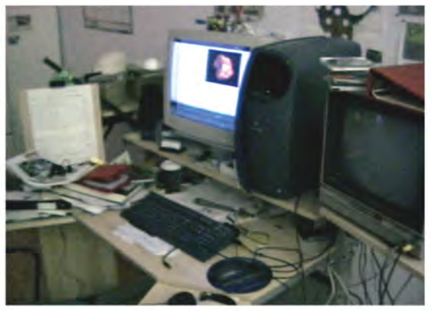
what's in a name?

if your youth had you poised in front of shelves teeming with multiples did you choose the first off the rack, or dig near the back for an untouched box? If you could not discern which toy might be untouched how did you come to choose the one you did? Perhaps the few boxes you touched were cause for some transference, making them worthy of choice - a child's game to bond with a thing. Naming would be the next stage of communion. I christen thee "Walnut". And were the toy afterward to be unceremoniously tossed into a bin containing hundreds of duplicates, there would come the trauma of knowing Walnut was lost somewhere among identicals. Relating to objects is arguably at the core of Relationship, and all that may imply. When I meet the artist Kristan Horton our first business is an introduction.

It is dark and cramped in Horton's studio, which is all of 350 sq ft. I can't help thinking what being inside a computer might be like. This is where Horton creates objects at the speed of 2, 048 per minute (or more precisely, his computer does).

"It could be much faster than this with the appropriate hardware; quite costly ... and I would have to find a new data set."

What Horton refers to as his "data set", are phone books. There is little more here than one might find in a boarding house, a table, a chair, and a phone book. Horton works on the premise that in mass production a designation becomes more valuable than the object itself. He examines the nature of an object's identity from the perspective of speed. High-end 3d software and customized code create the virtual objects, which Horton refers to as 'sculptures'. They are generated by the computer and subsequently 'named' by drawing upon a database of information (his phone book on CD ROM). The end results show 2,048 uniquely named sculptures every minute. This creates 122, 880 sculptures per hour. That is certainly prolific, even by today's standards. Lucky for Horton no object having mass is accelerated beyond the speed of light.



"Speed is one of the key features of computers. Speed with information comprise its power. That's a database. When I created a program to produce 1000's of objects every minute and called each one a sculpture, it became impossible to keep up with naming them and I began referring to them as 'batch 1' and 'batch 2', a kind of per minute naming, a time based naming system. But I was falling into the same problem any warehouse experiences, 'What the hell's in that box?' The process was moving me farther away from the objects themselves. The problem was I just couldn't think up that many names. And at the same time,



that many names do exist. I had to seek out those names, like an object, and pair them to the process. That's when I started using the phone book." K.Horton

What this artist is doing when he names objects is retrieving their individual identity from a condition that threatens them. The value shifts from the object to the name - Enframing?
"The dominion of Enframing as the essence of modern technology and the concomitant presence of the standing-reserve are most clearly seen in the realm of machine technology, where no object has significance in itself and where the 'orderability' of everything, from energy and statistics to machines and persons, is all-important." (Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays, Lovitt, trans. (Harper & Row, 1977)) It is strange in light of Heidegger's concept of Enframing that this artist should see such an endeavor as hopeful; where the 'orderability' of everything is almost a prerequisite to acknowledge its existence. As though Being were brought into/through, evoked from a thing upon introduction The name holds the key to individual identity, but at the same time limits the object's potential to Be, and again, is impossible if the thing is to be known. But this aspect may now be leading away from the artist's intent - that in mass production a designation becomes more valuable than the object itself - not a strict treatise on Being, or at least to Being in all its potential.

"Almost every process I can think of has been examined by someone who subsequently made a recommendation. The recommendation is usually related to efficacy. 'How can we move those things faster? ' Or 'what would it take to cut our materials in half? " And when a process has been tweaked in this way we begin to have more 'stuff'. The objects are merely a representation of tolerance, the results of the more thoroughly examined process; individual value is supplanted by an ingenious process. This toy gun is perhaps interesting on its own but when I tell you that 1.7 million were manufactured it lakes on a meaning separate from individual aesthetics. It becomes statistical and political. And what I became interested in was how, on a practical level, our relationship to objects would require a mediator to make any sense out of those millions. That in order to get back to objects from an overpowering process, we require introductions, we require names." the artist

Assigning proper names from the telephone book is like christening the objects. With a phone number the naming is rather intimate compared to, say, simply a number. It emphasizes the experience in stronger subjective terms. "The object in the most primitive relationships is, to the infant, indistinguishable from his own self. Winnicott referred to such an object as a "subjective object" to contrast it with an "object objectively perceived." (Davis & Wallbridge, Boundary and Space, An Introduction to the work of D.W. Winnicott,(Brunner/Mazel, 1987))
Like a prodigous father, Horton seeks to bring the object closer to himself through this subjective procedure. Bringing them into his world, making them more a part of himself. Yet unlike the subjective object, a distinction brings about this harmony. It is helpful to consider that these objects are abstract. Not like thousands of toy tractors, or squirt-guns, or horses, already carrying a clue to their identity.
The orchestration makes an interesting proposition for the status of the object. This is the contemporary site for production and management. For years, institution and business alike have grappled with the challenge of inventory, giving presence to the bar code, the database, and countless input/tracking devices such as the scanner and, most recently, the wearable computer. Production and management compete for resources. The ability to comprehend the external world involves the ability to interpret, distinguish, and relate what seem singular or at least singular groups of things. Comprehending the external world is a process of forming interconnections between these singular things. The phone company has known this for years.

K.H.

TV Relief:

Tableau Vivant

Inspired by composition techniques in painting, Tableaux are most commonly understood as literary representations depicting important events and giving the flow of life and its synchronous interpretation a collapsed moment of focus. Thus it is specific, or all encompassing. It is both a literary and temporal edit that gives focus and allows recourse to the past; a privilege granted through technology. It breaks the convention of a synchronous existence, or at least gives the illusion of doing so, allowing us to return to a specific moment. It is what information technology hailed as asynchronous communication. Yet it seems plausible perhaps to conclude that pictures have provided this privilege for a long time. To employ the Tableaux allows us to ask questions such as, "What moment might mean the most to me?" or "What capture signifies the total experience?" Presumably, the tableau vivant has chosen its moment carefully. Television is such a departure from this concept where moment is replaced by flow. Where moment and its ability to convey the entirety is replaced by flow whose fluxuations must be taken in before a complete 'picture' is made. In TV Relief, Horton began with the question, "what does television look like?" but the endeavour shows something more like "can I make televised images physical?" In the motivation, I can understand a certain long-



ing for the viewer of any image for the deictic, the contingent conditions it represents. To stem flow and hold the focused moment, this disposition for presence is what Horton endeavours to isolate. Traditional relief is one whose image is typically premeditated and often highly stylised. Whereas in 'tv relief' the only premeditation is in choice of still image not in the composition of the image itself. It reminds me of Barthes in his search for a single photograph to remember his deceased mother, the one from many, that will stand as enduring aspect of the whole. If the tableaux may be seen as an arrangement of objects, a question of whose purpose may be served. But here the architecture of the tableau is constructed, not by Horton but by the various forces present in the making of the television show. This narrows the intent down to appropriation where Horton's goal may be seen by what additional moves he makes, in this case by extending it into the traditional form of sculpture where a context of permanence is imposed; this moment cast in bronze that celebrates the coming together of two large public figures. In some light this can be interpreted as memorial, dedication, etc. It is also possible that there is a kitsch element posing here, a cross of popular culture and traditional art form, an anachronism of genre. This relief is an extrusion based on a scale of light to dark. It conveys a kind of physical reaching perhaps mirroring television's projected transmission, of light reaching the eye at various velocities extending the reach of vision. it is also a play on words - relief from television and relief of television. Either might hold the moment for inspection. What strikes me as odd in this process is that if anything might be called a living picture, television is it. To take a picture out of that condition and place it within the stasis of relief sculpture begins to suggest a fascination, something someone wishes to hold on to. To transport the experience into a world of ownership. **KGH**





previous page: TV Relief: *Oprah and Julia*, 2002, Kristan Horton

TALK ANONO

K. HORTON



Kristan Horton *Various Carvings:* Civilization and its Discontents, Future of an Illusion, Two Short Accounts of Psychoanalysis, used books, approx. 7 x 5 in.
Toronto

Sharp Knives and Spare Time

Visiting the ROM one evening in Toronto I pay particular interest this trip to the ancient egyptian methods of writing. Of particular interest are the stamping motifs for making impressions on clay tablets. They are a lot like cookie cutters and clever devices for decorating a cake. But they remind me that writing, as a means of recording has always made this rather damaging impact. Writing without a surface, upon which to make an impression, remains as a thought; unless uttered by the actor, where even so the air is disturbed. All communication is a disturbance, and as if that notion circles back on me at this very moment, thought too is a disturbance; a reminder so frantically recoursed through Artaud. For something to be said, so must another make way; another word, another surface, another context. This is not to suggest a perpetual displacement in a physical sense only, nor denying the recombinatory effects of such distubances, but rather to highlight a particular action found in Kristan Horton's work entitled, *'Carving'*. The work consists quite simply of 3 hardcover books picked from a bin in a second hand bookshop. Upon each book, a new title has been carved with a pen-knife; outlining the letters and removing the trace. Each of the titles refers to the work of Sigmond Freud, including: *Civilization and its Discontents, Future of an Illusion*, and *Two Short Accounts of Psychoanalysis.* The three unrelated books now form a set, and are displayed in a relatively straightforward manner – all three books sit upright on discrete wall-shelves. Certainly these are in the tradition of Arte Povera, or literally 'poor art' and if not careful, a discriminating tone may be employed when saying it, for these little objects appear victimized.

The cover of a book is in the service of its contents, protecting and concealing it from immediate consumption. It is both armour and crest as in heraldry. If it is a book that one covets, marring is bearable upon inner pages but tragic to the outer. A communication of importance, in this way, the cover is also like the mane of the lion. It is also, then, a rather clear target and a complement to the act of writing, or in this case, re-writing. But what is odd in *Carving* is choice of words. Horton has employed a particular method, or literal method, to inscribe his titles upon 3 hardcover books. His method is synonymous with defacement, or graffitti, it has a rebelious appearance, but they are not his titles; he inscribes academia instead of 'fuck you'. In some ways, it's like the Dodo who lays it's eggs in another birds nest, but here it is more like a practical joker who switches the eggs from one nest to another without any eggs of his own. This practical agency may be revealing of more than a laugh. It's like the desperate act of the amatuer to become legitimate through whatever means possible, in a sense, attempting to write himself, or in this case, write objects into his life as a kind of wish.

Kristan Horton is a visual artist living in Toronto, Canada

