



PERFORMING HUMAN THROUGH ANIMAL

BY

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ABSTRACT

The exhibition *Performing Human through Animal* is comprised of animal sculptures that explore anthropomorphic characters, for the purpose of communicating desire, addiction and degradation through allegory. Animal forms speak directly to human characteristics. I simultaneously use this to evoke humour through the ridiculous circumstances of the individual and collective narratives of the artworks. The underlying intent was to symbolically use the animal figures to discuss human intellectual and emotional conflicts, which result during periods of abstinence from our desires and addictions. This exhibition aimed to engage the impulsiveness of the addict. The consumption of excess, the pleasure of satisfying desire, and the battle against these desires. With these pieces, I engaged my own struggle with addiction, the processes one goes through when confronting temptation and relapse; the use of allegory helps the viewer to identify with figures, permitting recollections of their own impulsiveness to consume in excess.

Keywords: symbolic constructs, human identity, allegory, anthropomorphic characters, desire, addiction, relapse, sculpture

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Dedicado a meu amores

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For all the Strength, Love and daily reminders to Play as much as possible

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INTRODUCTION

At the age of seven, I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. I was encouraged to engage learning through my tactile interactions with objects. This has continued in my studio practice and has evolved into developing my own visual vocabulary as a sculptor. This process can be found in the decisions I make while building up the animal figures using hand modeling clay. For example, what the final size of the pig would be and how the viewer will interact with it. These are all elements considered primarily through touch, presence and visualizing multiple ways of how the work could be read and experienced. My sculptural process includes modeling clay, mold making, and casting. I am choosing to communicate through three- dimensional sculptural work to create a lived experience with an infinite number of perspectives.

Through the process of researching and making, I arrived at the following questions that are explored in the work and this paper: the possibilities of intentionally communicating multiple ideas in a single allegorical work, in this case, excesses that lead to desire and addiction, using fables as an effective tool for confronting my own personal trauma without reducing the artworks to catharsis; all the while, opening spaces in the work for empathy that may assist the viewer to reflect on their own vices.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGIES

Pig on a Trash Can

Upon entering the *Performing Human through Animal*

exhibition, the viewer finds themselves in front of a 24-inch flat monitor mounted on a column, with a looped video of recorded physical experimental sketches

enacted by me. The video sketches

set the tone of the exhibition by showing my attempts to literally perform human/animal. In the main exhibition space, the viewer immediately encounters a larger than life sculpture of a hare with its neck dramatically stretched back. The hare is sitting on a three-tier cake in the centre of the gallery. In the far-right corner, a contorted pig is on its head resting on an upside-down trash can.

The pig is in a contorted pose, with its head, neck, shoulders and front legs squashed on a galvanized garbage can (see fig. 1). This comments on the extreme approaches to breeding and inbreeding farmed animals. The pig is smiling, its lower body is positioned vertically above its head, and the animal's own weight is crushing down on its shoulders. The impossible position the animal is portrayed in, is also



Fig. 1 David Salazar. *Pig on a Trash Can*, Plastic Resin (2007).
Dimensions H 72" x W 24"

intended to be an allegory for the never ending human demands and expectations we place on ourselves. The artwork attempts to mirror the human and artistic control over the animal's anatomy with the social and state systems of control the human body experiences.

The over turned garbage can is removed from its common purpose of collecting trash. It now serves as a pedestal, a column elevating the contorted pig for reflection by the viewer. The vertical ornamental grooves on the garbage can further echo the resemblance to the fluting on architectural columns. The pig sculpture is three feet high, cast in plastic resin and painted in a pastel pink. When the Pig is mounted on the steel garbage can, the total height of the sculpture is approximately six feet.

Rabbit on a Cake



Fig. 2 David Salazar, *Rabbit On, a Cake Plastic Resin* (2017). Dimensions H 72" x W 48"

Both viewers and readers may wonder why when the rabbit sculpture has large long ears like a hare, I am referring to the sculpture as Rabbit in this paper and titled the artwork *Rabbit on a Cake* (see fig. 2). The reason is simple. I am aware they are not the same animal, but throughout my research on historical allegorical symbolism, it has become consistently apparent that both animals are used interchangeably when referencing lust and fecundity.

The sculpture is of a large Rabbit that sits in an upright position, with open legs and its paws between the legs. The neck and head of the rabbit are stretched back dramatically with eyes closed and mouth slightly open. The height of the rabbit sculpture is three and a half feet tall. The Rabbit sitting on top of a three-foot cake is a direct reference to the stereotypical bachelor party stunt of a young woman popping out of a cake as a grand prize to be claimed.

The ambiguous representation of the rabbit on an oversized cake references fertility and sexual connotations to the animal in Christianity, Western Antiquity and contemporary secular culture. These associations are made based on the rabbit and hare's high level of reproduction. The elongated stretched neck can be read as a signifier of ecstasy or a broken neck as a sign of excess and overindulgence.

The cake is used as a reference to celebration at its maximum. The cake's enormous stature re-enforces the notion of pleasure and the excessive indulgence of the rabbit. This sculpture in its entirety is a symbol of the funny, the ridiculous, the spectacle and the excessive.

The rabbit sculpture is cast in plastic resin and painted a monochrome green. The exterior of the cake is covered with a white royal frosting with ornamental designs. The ornamental patterns are made of blue and white sugar capsules and silver sugar balls. The total height of the rabbit sculpture on the cake is six and a half feet.

Independent Study in Florence, Italy

The research influencing *Performing Human through Animal* began in the spring of 2016 with a two-month Independent Study in Florence, Italy overseen by OCAD University Professor Dr. Martha Ladly. This research was fundamental to my studio practice as a sculptor, where I use a traditional hand modeling technique of clay and wax similar to that of the studio practice of Italian Renaissance and contemporary artists.

In Florence, with the help of art historian Dr. Katharina Giraldi, I studied the anatomical techniques and compositional approaches used by artists such as Michelangelo, Donatello and Ghiberti. My focus was to study how narratives and allegories work together in the representation of both humans and animals in art.

I gained a better understanding of symbolic imagery used to communicate Italian Christian and pre-Christian cultural ideologies. This research has influenced my use of the rabbit/hare as a symbol to express the indulgence of human desire.

No Animals Were Harmed in the Making of this Studio Research



Fig. 3 David Salazar. *Video Stills form No Animals Were Harmed in the Making of this Studio Research (2016).*

No Animals Were Harmed in the Making of this Studio Research (see fig. 3), is a series of three recorded video sketches which have influenced the anatomical production of the sculptures presented in *Performing Human through Animal*. They reveal my experimenting with a new approach to modeling clay, the physicality of my body impacting a solid surface, and a study of the human body in relation to gravity.

In the first video, I stand in front of a camera and apply wet clay onto my face. Originally the idea was to record myself sculpting an animal. The intent of the exercise was to develop a better understanding of my studio process by observing myself hand modeling clay. I began the exercise by sculpting a bird, this quickly felt awkward and unnatural so I abruptly changed my approach by directly applying clay to my face.

Initially, the clay felt cold and wet; the longer it was in contact with my face it warmed up and its weight began to feel like an extension of my body. With my face completely covered in clay, I experienced a sense of vulnerability and anxiety, which I had not anticipated. Although, I was curious about what the forms looked like covering my face, I became less concerned with creating a representational image for the viewer. The focus became to maintain an even flow of air for breathing. This objective influenced the

shapes my hands made in the clay. While performing this exercise, I meditated on the state of being, concentrating on breathing while manipulating matter as an extension of my body.

After viewing the sketches, I was unsettled because the image was out of focus, and decided to re-shoot. On further reflection, I came to the conclusion that the blurred imagery was appropriately similar to making people self-conscious and uncomfortable when preparing to take a photograph of someone. The more I thought about the unfocused image the more I realized it portrayed my own self-consciousness and discomfort. It also worked to my advantage, given that I am speaking about unclear notions of dealing with active addiction and relapse. It relays the experience to my attempts to conceal my own substance abuse in the past. Under the influence, I did not have a clear vision of what was happening around me. My attempts to conceal addiction only led people to suspect that they were not getting a clear representation of who I was. These studio experiments allowed for an alternative form of anatomical study through the use of my own body unlike anything I have done before. The same hand modeling technique used to create the animal sculptures was applied to one of my studio investigations. The difference was the end result - the sculptures are static, whereas this recording is animated. Applied to my face the clay unintentionally functions as a mask, framed by my hair, neck, and shoulders. The malleability of the material allowed for rapid morphing of shapes ranging from the curious to the grotesque. Excited by this new experience I found myself contemplating new approaches to my work. This led to the contortions of Pig and Rabbit, more movement and energy in the sculptural form,

challenging their static existence.

Genesis of the Pig

Italo Calvino was a modern 20th century Italian journalist, essayist, and fiction writer whose work still influences contemporary literature and society. He is well known for his novels, *Invisible Cities* (1972) and *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1973). *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1985) is a book of essays that was supposed to be delivered by Calvino as a lecture at Harvard University between 1985-6 but was unrealized due to his death in 1985 (Creagh).

I was captivated by Calvino's perspective for the creation of his novels. There seems to be a parallel between his process of creation and my practice of making artworks. To use Calvino's language, like him I start with a "mental image". In chapter four of *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, entitled "Visibility", Calvino illustrates the development of an idea from its initial stage of "mental image" to its transformation into a "final expression".

Calvino distinguishes between two types of imaginative processes; the first begins with the word, which leads to mental images of what is being communicated, and the second is when a person begins with a mental image and follows through to express

it verbally. The first process can be found in the act of reading a novel or a newspaper article: as the text is read, mental images animate what is being described to the reader. Depending on the quality of the author, the reader may vividly experience or feel like a witness to the scene being described (83).

In the second process, Calvino breaks down the method that goes into creating a film. He begins by stating that the moving images audiences experience originally begin with a visualization. This visualization then goes through a number of processes, before turning into its final material form of a written script. This script is then physically constructed on the set, filmed, edited and finally fixed in the frames of the film itself. Calvino states that as humans we all have a mental cinema that never stops projecting images before our eyes, and that this has been happening even before the invention of the moviola (83).

Although Calvino was not able to formulate meaning in conceptual or discursive terms from the mental images that formed the basis of his “fantastic” narratives, the images were charged with considerable intrigue, which would motivate him to have them further developed. One of these images was of a man cut in two halves, where each half went on living independently. Another example was of a boy who climbed a tree and made his way from tree to tree without ever coming down to earth. Calvino also imagined an empty suit of armor that moved and spoke as if someone was inside (Pg.88). These images themselves carried their own potentialities and once clear in Calvino’s mind they

stimulated a succession of new images, associations, symmetries and confrontations of possible narratives. Calvino's deliberate intent to give order to this new material gave direction to a storyline. The original image he first began with was no longer purely visual but had evolved conceptually and was ready to be developed in a written form (89). What was important to him at this stage was to achieve an equivalent of the mental image in written form, and then a coherent development of the initial stylistic direction. From this point forward it is the written word that begins to dominate the writing process, as the story is developed into verbal expression, and the visual image has no other choice but to tag along. (pg.89).

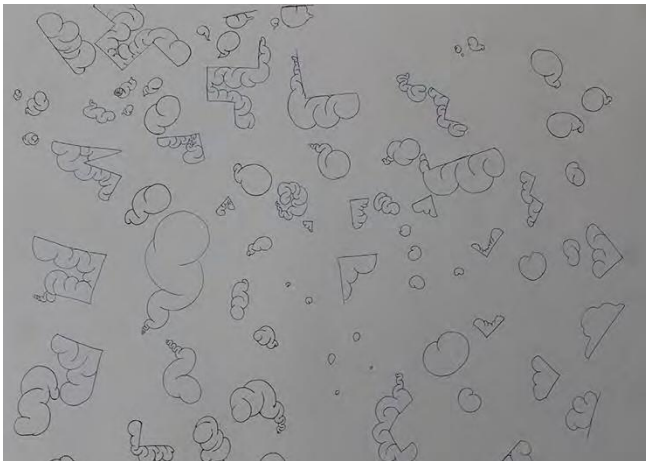


Fig. 4 David Salazar, *Blob/Bubble drawings* (2016).
Ink on paper. H 24" x W 32"

Similar to Calvino's process, my own ideas, also evolve from mental images, with multiple iterations that result in a sculptural object. The contorted pig sculpture developed through a series of amorphous blob/bubble drawings (see fig. 4).

Like Calvino, it all started with a compelling mental image, which I then executed with minimal detail. My process differs from Calvino's in that I created each drawn progression in between an inhalation and exhalation.

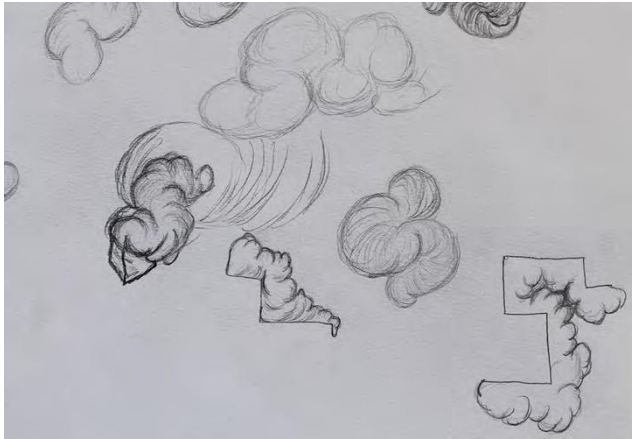


Fig. 5 David Salazar. *Pig Hoof* (2016). H 6" x W 9," Pencil on paper.

The breathing exercises and the drawings became a meditation for what I envisioned as "Perfect Sacks of Fat" floating in space. I wanted to evolve these drawings that I became interested in, and not wanting to disturb their form, began to question

what could be the cause for the disruption of these floating bodies. I explored possible narratives by introducing horizontal and right-angled lines to the composition. This caused the sack of fat to be grounded and the notion of gravity entered the conversation between an organic/malleable object in contact with a geometric, hard surfaced object.

The sack of fat became animated; pressing against a hard surface would allow for the opposite side to roll into its own body, creating countless possible designs and enjoyment on my part. The initially random doodles now began to develop conceptually, relating to bodies in a primal state of existence, grounded by gravity on a surface. These drawn sacks of fat also relate to my studio practice which involves modeling animal figures in clay; where a consideration of the relationship of the living body and the weight of clay to gravity are all contemplated. An interest in anatomy creates curiosity about how the body begins to be pulled down by gravity through old age.



Fig. 6 David Salazar, *Pig drawing* (2016). Ink on paper. H 9" x W 6"

I pay close attention to an animal's anatomy and the relationship between its skeleton, to muscle, fat, skin, feathers, scales or fur. This exercise made me think of the bending of a finger where I observed how at one end skin is stretched over bone while the interior of the bend becomes a meeting point for compressed muscles and skin. I continued to explore the bending of an arm, leg and whole bodies, observing the voluptuous inner thighs of a person. The bulge of love handles created by tight pants, the stomach folding onto itself as a person sits on a chair.



Fig. 7 Salazar, David. *Pig Maquette*. (2016). Oil based clay. H 11" x W 6" x D 5"

The drawings of sacks of flesh began to be directly influenced by observing living bodies, the elasticity of skin, the texture of cellulite, and slowly the drawings shifted from single line drawings to depicting the sacks of fat in sketch like drawing gestures. The drawings developed into individual body parts crushing down on themselves at various pressure points. The first image of the pig appeared in the form of a single leg curled up onto itself with a hoof (see fig. 5); the studies

of sacks of fat collapsing onto themselves guided the pig's body position with all its weight on its shoulders (see fig. 6).

This image continued to captivate my curiosity. I began trying to understand why the pig would be in such an unnatural vertical position, which was seemingly painful. In contrast to the pig's body posture, the smile held on its face communicated a sense of ambiguity; was it alive, dead or was it performing yoga or acrobatics? Whatever it was, the pig was in an extremely vulnerable position with its anus exposed.

At the same time, the animal's cultural associations entered the conversation, and to borrow Calvino's words, it's the images themselves that develop their own potentials, the story they carry within themselves (Calvino 89). The animal has been associated with fertility, prosperity, gluttony, greed, lust, unbridled passion and uncleanness (Cooper 166-67). All of these connotations were imbued in the drawn image.

At this point in the studio production there were more questions than answers, but there was enough to continue developing the maquette. I continued to parallel Calvino's creation process by transferring my drawings into sculpture (see fig. 7).

Where Calvino searches for the equivalent of the mental image in written form, I search for the equivalent of the drawn image through the act of hand modeling clay. Calvino uses words to develop his story, whereas it is choice of materials: the contortion of the animal's body, every muscle and roll of fat that make up the visual literacy of my sculptural narratives.

The term visual literacy is described as the “ability to decode, interpret, question, challenge and evaluate texts that communicate with visual images rather than words” (Carry). It is conceptually important that the Pig and Rabbit be at eye level to the viewer, because I believe addiction and relapse is an issue that needs to be confronted face on. I wanted the work to be viewed at “eye level” so the viewer was not looking down or up at the work. This became the opportunity to further develop the work conceptually, because the object used to raise the sculpture would serve as an element to contribute to the intended meaning for the contortion of the pig. Deciding on what object the contorted pig would have a dialogue with, I began to experiment with a mass-produced object. I believed the galvanized steel garbage can could contribute various narratives in relation to the contorted animal. I also believe that this mass-produced object locates my work within a contemporary context for the viewer to relate to.

By integrating the steel garbage can it becomes removed from its common purpose. In my work, the can serves the function of symbolizing a system put in place to deal with our waste. In relation to the pig it becomes a pedestal: a column elevating the contorted pig for reflection.

Genesis of the Rabbit

Inspired by my summer in Florence, I drew on traditions of biblical symbolism of animals for my research on the creation of Rabbit. The Holy Ghost represented by the white dove in Christian iconography conjures Titian's painting *Madonna of the Rabbit*, (1530). The portrait of the Madonna amidst an Arcadian landscape set in the Venetian countryside with the Alps in the distance, depicts the young Mary in the centre of the canvas wearing a red dress and a blue cloak (Habert). To her right is the 4th century martyred saint dressed like the 16th century Venetian woman, Catherine of Alexandria, who presents the Holy Child to Mary. The child is wrapped in a white cloth as per Christian liturgy which states that what is sacred cannot be held with bare hands (Habert). The Virgin Mary strokes a white rabbit at her feet, and in the near background to the figures' left is a shepherd tending to his sheep.

An analysis of the painting by Jean Habert, curator in the Department of Paintings at the Louvre, specifies how the rabbit in antiquity was thought to reproduce without sexual intercourse. In religious iconography, the white rabbit alludes to chastity or triumph over one's own passions. In this painting the animal represents Mary's virginity and the miraculous conception of Christ without sin (Habert, Louvre).

In *Performing Human through Animal*, I have decided to go in the opposite direction. The rabbit does not suggest triumph over one's own passions, but is embracing the pleasurable act of gratifying its own desires. For myself, the triumph over passion is a difficult task and I am interested in speaking to the emotional and mental state of battling desire or succumbing to indulgence. I believe that this is an honest conversation that the viewer can relate to.

Reflecting on the use of the rabbit as an ambiguous symbol of triumph over passion and the abandonment of oneself to sensual indulgence reminded me of the Playboy logo as a contemporary example of the appropriation of the rabbit as a symbol of sexuality. In this context, the bunny is the central metaphor of the popular magazine founded by Hugh Hefner and his associates in 1953. The glossy magazine is notable for its centerfolds of nude models (Playmates), and has featured a plethora of celebrity icons since launching its debut issue in 1953 with Marilyn Monroe. Other celebrities include Pop music artist Madonna in 1985, and Kate Moss on the cover for the magazine's 60th anniversary issue, where she is seen wearing a bunny outfit (bbc.com).

In an article written for The Guardian, 31 May 2011, Kira Cochrane references a 1967 interview where Hugh Hefner explains his choice of the rabbit as the Playboy's logo: The bunny "has sexual meaning", he said, "because it's a fresh animal, shy, vivacious, jumping – sexy. First it smells you, then it escapes, then it comes back, and you feel like caressing it, playing with it. A girl resembles a bunny. Joyful, joking" (Hefner, 1967).

In Christian iconography, the Virgin Mary is associated with the image of the rabbit to communicate her chastity as a form of virtue through sexual abstinence (Impelluso 238). It is my opinion that when Hefner states that the bunny "has sexual meaning", he is tapping into the historical use of the rabbit as a symbol of sexual activity and applying it to his models with the intent to stimulate carnal pleasure. It is my intent to unite the rabbit as a symbol of both sexual desire and chastity in *Performing Human through Animal*. Attempting to unite opposites in one image brings to mind the postulations of Greek

philosopher Heraclitus: that opposites are not contrary aspects but complementary sides of a unity (Cohen). The Rabbit therefore both embodies opposition and tension.

Marc Cohen, professor at Washington University explains how Greek Philosopher Heraclitus describes cases where a single object simultaneously characterizes both opposing forces (Unity of opposites). His example of a bow and a lyre illustrate an object where opposites are simultaneously present in a single object. Harmony exists in the opposing tension created by the string and the bow. The string is pulled on both ends by the bow, while the bow itself is subjected to opposing force at both ends by the string. These opposing forces allow the bow to function, and without uniting these opposites the bow could not function (Cohen).

My intent as an artist is to produce an animal sculpture that externalizes the rabbit form that plays with these multiple contexts and meanings of the animal in culture. I want to bring tension by uniting the opposite meanings: lust/chastity, and desire/abstinence.

In Florence, my interest in desire and self-restraint was influenced by the aroma of food and taste. At every corner, of the city I found myself at a restaurant or a gelateria experimenting with an array of sweets with an espresso. It wasn't long before I became aware of my own relationship with desire for the sensual pleasure of food and drink, including substance abuse.

Visiting the indoor food market in Florence (il Mercato Centrale) became as important to my research as the animal symbols I was researching in painting and sculpture: the strong flavoured blue-veined cheese, Pecorino Toscan, a cheese topped with ground walnuts, sliced apples, tomatoes, honey, truffles, rosemary; the musty smell

of the air-dried Bresaola, bread bathed in olive oil, that welcomed my nose and mouth with the smell of fresh-cut grass and vegetable flavour. The mixture of prosciutto's salty and natural sweetness, crispy vegetables, the sharp pungent flavour of arugula, the succulent tomatoes, and the basil bought to prepare pesto that was extremely aromatic with a scent of pepper. The handmade pasta to accompany Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese's sharp fruity and nutty flavour and its crystal-like gritty texture; the aroma of cherries; the Chianti Classico wine mixing with the juices protruding from every bite of the Bistecca alla Fiorentina cooked medium rare; Cannoli stuffed with a sweetened filling of whipped ricotta, nuts, or chocolate; and the bitter medicinal taste of Fernet Branca with a strong menthol flavour of peppermint and spearmint, to help digestion. Purchasing ingredients at the market, preparing food, and presenting meals prepared by my wife and myself became a ritual for celebrating the senses.

My well-seasoned addictive personality stimulated every meal into a ceremony of over indulgences, and on several occasions, lack of control resulted in great discomfort. I was able to experience over indulgence with my wife and once the delightful debauchery of our meal settled, she was surprised at how willingly she had lost self-control and continued to eat regardless of whether she was satisfied or not. This experience taught me how substance abuse and desire for food could be communicated simultaneously. I began to think of situations where the act of over indulgence, losing control and gluttony are excused and even encouraged in social gatherings such as at feasts, banquets, and other celebrations.

Margaret Visser, author of *The Rituals of Dinner*, describes the cake at every party

as a signifier of the outward display of excess celebration, where people come together to feast and overindulge (27). This is why I decided to place the hare sculpture on top of the cake. The cake in this work represents an object of desire, ready to be consumed at the appropriate time. People just don't go running to grab a handful of the cake, there is a social etiquette and self-discipline governing the appropriate time for indulgence.

The cake therefore is an object of desire that functions both in the literal and metaphorical sense to symbolize many forms of desire both healthy and unhealthy. The rabbit is a projection of the dark side of desire, which, whether we openly admit it or not, embodies the tension of battling temptation. There is a difference between simple indulgences and full addiction, which is when you can't stop. The way in which I describe my gluttonous experience in Italy can be comparable in certain respects to other instances where lack of self-control using both legal and illegal substances resulted in fatal consequences.

The rabbit on the cake is a direct reflection of my lived experience with drug addiction and the internal tribulations of experiencing sobriety for the past eleven years. The function of the rabbit on the cake activates desire. Its overextended neck can suggest its death. On the other hand, the rabbit's paws indicate it is actively pleasuring itself, reinforcing that it is alive.

If the euphoria of active addiction can be associated with the rabbit on the cake, then the contorted pig on the garbage can is the inevitable aftermath. The anxiety brought on by the deterioration in mood is a result of withdrawing from stimulants. The rabbit and the pig complement one another by inhabiting the same gallery space. They are speaking

to what may seem to be an endless cycle between the highs and lows of active addiction and relapse; both can feel like eternity. Here they are frozen.

Reflecting and speaking of substance abuse doesn't harm me. Open dialogue and reflection does not allow these desires to ferment. But if they're not attended to they become overwhelming, which can lead to them being desired. My desires alone don't cause me any harm; it's when I indulge in certain desires that my actions can have fatal consequences, because I don't only eat a piece of cake but the whole cake. I present the image of my sculptures as personal allegories. However, my personal experience is not necessary for the interpretation of the work. I also hope to evoke personal allegories for every viewer of the sculptures. The rabbit on the cake is the maximum level of uncontrolled desire and I believe most people can relate in one form or another to this metaphor.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The artists that I have drawn from in my thesis work are Antoine-Louis Barye, Tom Dean, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, and Fernando Botero. Their works, practices and techniques serve to inform my own sculptural approach in a variety of ways. Each artist influences my practice in a specific way, and they respectively and collectively share a commonality that finds itself embedded in my pieces.

Tension and Representation of the Animal Figure

The sculptures of 19th-century artist Antoine-Louis Barye (Paris, 1795 - 1875). Barye was a highly skilled painter and printmaker but is better known for his animal sculptures. His animal figures range from small scale to monumental bronze sculptures, such as, *Lion and Serpent*, (1835), located in the Louvre Museum, Paris, France.

The ability to communicate an identifiable representation of an animal that utilizes tension in its form is of utmost importance to my work. Barye depicts his animals in romanticized epic scenarios, where tension is at its peak and the mood is accentuated by the animal's exaggerated gesture and muscular anatomy (Montalbetti Valérie, louvre.fr).

The violence that is depicted between predator and prey devouring each other has influenced my work, as seen in the tension and violence expressed through the contortion of the animals' body gesture. My goal is to take the literal struggle between predator and prey and apply it metaphorically using my experience with mental illness and overcoming substance abuse. This is expressed sculpturally in the work and is further explained in the section above about Rabbit and Cake.

I continued my research by turning my attention to the work of Tom Dean, a multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto. Between 2006 and 2008 I had the pleasure of assisting Dean on his public art commission *Peaceable Kingdom*, installed in King Edward Village, Vancouver (2008). This body of work is made up of twenty-two animal sculptures cast in bronze, that are installed in an interior courtyard made up of a condominium, a public library, and commercial space.

Dean's title, *Peaceable Kingdom*, is a direct reference to the Bible (Isaiah 11:6). The wolf shall dwell with the lamb...the leopard lies down with the young goat... and a little child will lead them (Catholic Bible). Dean proposes through this title and composition of the animals that this is a scene of paradise, where predator and prey coexist in harmony.

Dialoguing with Dean while assisting his project, he described how the sow and serpent are presented as "being in a loving embrace"; both animals lay in rest and look off to the distance. This is an element that captivates me in Dean's work, the tension created by juxtaposing predator and prey, but not in the predictable manner found in

Barye's work. Dean on the other hand implies a peaceful scene with his characters embracing each other.

The second sculpture of Dean's that is influential to my work is a young goat resting on the shoulder of a muscular leopard, the goat stretches out its neck to kiss the leopard's ear. Dean imagines that this is the moment before sin enters the garden. He explains that from the corner of the public library an army of rats led by a beaver make their way towards the inner courtyard where all the animals rest. "Once paradise is disturbed, all hell will break loose and the large vulture perched on a ledge above will take advantage of this opportunity" (Tom Dean, September 2007). The sense of violence between the animals is almost canceled out by the possibility of "agreement" between the beast figures. In this sculpture, the animals' survival instincts almost disappear, Dean portrays the opposite from Barye's romanticized slaughter. Dean unites opposites, predator and prey are in a loving embrace, or waiting for the "right moment" to attack. There is a narrative to draw the viewer into a fantastical world layered in symbolism and contradictions behind Dean's visual language. The possibility of the outcome between predator and prey is left to the individual to question their own belief on whether or not peace can ever be a reality, or perhaps contemplate compassion for the vulnerable.

Unlike Dean's, more anatomically accurate depictions of animals, my intention in creating animal imagery is to reference nature, without reliance on faithful representations, aware that it is certainly not reproducible. I would like the viewer to read the figure as a pig or a rabbit, but not necessarily depend on an anatomically correct realism. I suggest a sense of violence through the contortions of the pig and the body

gestures of the rabbit. By borrowing from Dean's approach of creating intrigue through the tension brought by the vulnerability of the goat and the muscular predator, I embody the expression of tension, the notion of dualities within the body gesture of the pig and rabbit sculpture.

The ambiguous and visual tension of the rabbit made me think of the work of 17th-century Baroque sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini, particularly his marble sculpture of the *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*. Charles Avery, author of *Bernini Genius of the Baroque*, describes the sculpture as a dramatic scene with St. Teresa sitting on billowing marble clouds, covered with drapery, her head slightly tilted back with her eyes and mouth slightly open. A puckish angel is above her, with one hand lifting Theresa's robe and the other holding a golden arrow pointed directly at the middle of her body. In the background, gilded bronze rays cast down from above the monument where a hidden window illuminates the figures. In Teresa's biography, she states how she was met by an angel and was filled with a divine sensation of being spiritually penetrated (Avery 145-46).

Examining Bernini's sculpture, Simon Schama writes that the *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, ambiguously balances her own account of longing for her soul to be consummated and united with God. But the way she wrote about it was metaphorical. The intensity of the emotional experience could only be related to that of a bodily experience, where pain and pleasure are inseparably mixed (Schama pg.113). The stretched neck in the rabbit sculpture is also intended to instigate emotion. It plays with significations of ecstasy, pain, excess and overindulgence. Expressing human emotion through the exaggeration of the rabbit's neck or the contortion of the pigs' body is to instigate a sense of sensuality or

empathy in the reading of the work. This is a method I associate with the Italian Baroque. *Ecstasy of St. Theresa* is a perfect example of how Bernini perfected the ability to communicate emotion through theatrical techniques, integrating light and various materials to contribute to the sensual experience of the viewer. The proposal at the time, requested by the church was for all Christians to enjoy and use all their senses to transport themselves emotionally as they imagined the events they were meditating. Through art, they would sense the burning fires of hell, glories of heaven, the harsh lashing of whips, and even the thorns piercing Christ's head. As a tool of propaganda, the intent of Art was to reinvigorate Christian practice and belief (Stokstad pg367).

Although I am not creating work for the church, I do apply the same technique Bernini uses in his work. In order to express emotion and stimulate a sense of empathy I have taken metaphorical license by contorting the animals' bodies to represent my experience in active addiction. The contortion of the animals' necks is reminiscent of Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*; I have borrowed this dramatic expression of ecstasy because I feel it is a successful representation of this emotion. I ask the viewer to empathize with the animals in my sculptures as a way for them to relate to their own experience with temptations.

I continue to study the expression of emotion through the visual vernacular of Colombian artist, Fernando Botero. Mariana Hanstein author of *Botero*, begins by asking the obvious question many people have regarding the artist's work. "Why does Botero paint fat people?" In reality, it is not only people that are subjected to his exaggerated voluminous forms. Also, objects: bananas, trees, chairs, light bulbs, animals; everything is exaggerated (Hanstein 49). Hanstein asserts that Botero is a figurative painter, but not a

realistic one; his pictures are geared to reality but do not depict it (49). The deformation of his figures springs from a desire to enhance the sensuous quality of this work (49).

How and why Botero has arrived at his eccentric style can be seen in the somewhat mythological account of when he was sketching a mandolin. Botero discovered that by reducing the central opening of the instrument he achieved a change to both proportions and volume of the instrument at an enormous scale (Sillevis 21). I believe that by altering the plasticity of his subject matter along with his application of vivid colours, these served as a methodology for engaging the viewer with violent narratives. This can be further seen in Botero's depiction of both natural and human invoked violence in the painting *20:15 Hours (Massacre)*. Botero presents a room filled with blood stained bodies on the ground, and a clock marking the moment in time when the destruction took place. Botero shows the impact of violence in daily life on innocent people (Sillevis 146). In *Earthquake*, a woman can be seen yelling out of her apartment. As it falls in the middle of the night, with nobody in sight to help her, it is inevitable that she and her neighbours will be buried under the rubble in the moments that follow (Sillevis 142).

For Botero, the images of power and aspects of violence are presented through vibrant colours and a sense of playfulness in his work. I appreciate how this allows for the viciousness, harshness and extremism to be approachable by the viewer. This element of Botero's work influenced the decision to apply vibrant colours to my animal sculptures. In *Performing Human through Animal*, the use of vibrant colour reflects a South American adaption to the European baroque. European baroque was imported to South America during the age of Absolutism (Hanstein 54). Today, you can walk through any South

American city or town and experience a different style of baroque than what you can find in Europe. South American churches, altars, crafts, paintings, and sculptures all express this over-the-top approach to sensuousness. Hanstein describes it as “everything in excess” (54). Hanstein describes Botero’s visual imagery as being directly rooted in a culture whose spirit feeds on myths and legend, the love of symbols and allegories have a path for creative qualities of exaggeration, extravagance and excess (54).

Expressing sensuality through exaggerated forms is a method apparent in both Botero’s and my approach to instigate narrative through the re-organization of a recognizable object. The decision to work with colour in *Performing Human through Animal* is very deliberate in a symbolic way. Choosing to paint the rabbit green came from associating the colour to the season of spring. I appropriated the significance of the colour green to symbolize the state of transition from the death of winter to the life of spring (Cooper 39). In active addiction, I found myself in volatile states between life and death. I use green to symbolize the transition from one state of consciousness to another. The colour pink to me symbolizes love, stability and serenity. This is why I chose to juxtapose that colour with the uncomfortable contortions of the pig. This also, creates another layer of tension. The fact that we are dealing with the heavy subject matter of addiction and the realities of relapse called for the introduction of the colour pink in order to lighten the dark mood.

Bernini, Dean and Botero’s studio methodologies of communicating tension while simultaneously evoking empathy served as fundamental sources in the development of my sculptures. I attempt to balance dualities and a sense of what may

be considered beautiful in contrast to the grotesque, the rational and the irrational.

Most of all, Dean and Botero serve as great examples of how to reference nature without committing to faithful representations, but to use it metaphorically and allegorically.

In addition to the visual artists mentioned above who inspired me I will now turn my attention to literary influences. These range from psychologist Maxine Harris' approach to exploring trauma through fables, to Jack Zipes and Sam Pickering's examination of Aesop's Fables, and Malcolm Bradbury's analysis of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. These are two of the most important influences, on the structure of allegory in my work. John Locke and Matteo Gilebbi expanded my understanding of the philosophical debates regarding the "Animal Question."

Aesop's Fables and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* are two examples referenced in this research for their use of animal figures in narratives as a method to engage a reader with difficult subject matter. In an introduction for Aesop's Fables, Sam Pickering describes the legendary author Aesop as a sophisticated storyteller who rose from slavery and spoke wisdom through his tales to the common people (278). Jack Zipes notes that the intent of Aesop and other fable writers is to address specific social problems. By engaging the reader or listener through allegory, the individual and community can build a sense of solidarity and learn that they are not alone in their predicament (280). In the afterword for a collection of Aesop's Fables, Jack Zipes describes the fable as being different from a fairy-tale. Its message can be related to the harsh reality of life with an ironic sense of humor, bluntness and clarity. Unlike the fairy tale, legend, or parable, the fable does not offer a happy ending and the protagonist of

Aesop's Fables are often lucky if they escape with their lives at the end (280).

George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, a political allegory about the former Soviet Union is also written in the form of a fable and Orwell notes in the afterword his intent to expose the totalitarian mythology of Russian regime (118). It was Orwell's intent for the story to be simply understood and easily translated into other languages (118). His decision to use animals allegorically came together when Orwell crossed paths with a little boy driving a huge horse-cart, and saw the boy whipping the horse, whenever it tried to turn. "It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat." (Orwell 118).

The harsh realities of senseless death, famine and endless suffering that many endured in Europe by the end of 1945 are unfortunately not isolated to the twentieth century, nor was it in Aesop's life time (500-600 B.C). The work of Orwell and Aesop are testament to the ability of animal allegorical narratives to engage people who experience distress through difficult moments within history. I adopt the fable structure in my sculptural practice by using animals and inanimate objects to create allegories as a way to speak to human desire and substance abuse. I find it to be an appropriate approach to speak to specific social problems in a way that is not condemning but humorous.

The Twenty-Four Carat Buddha is written by psychologist Maxine Harris, co-founder of Community Connections, the largest mental health wellness centre in Washington, D.C. Harris's book uses fables as an effective tool for trauma recovery (Dixie). The book

engages the reader through narrative as a safe way to confront difficult subjects, which the reader may be able to relate to their own life. The feelings aroused by reflecting on the fables are meant to help the healing process of a person searching to find self-value, strength and peace (Dixie).

The book is divided into two sections; the first part is a collection of short stories and the second part a series of questions about each fable. One of the stories, “Inktomi”, involves the largest and most magnificent spider of a forest who bears the same name as the story. Inktomi laments on how ugly and awkward he is. His longing to be different is so powerful that it obscures the virtues he already possesses. In the end, Inktomi believes that acquiring beautiful markings on his body will make him the most glorious spider in the forest. He covers his body with leaves then sets fire to the leaves, believing this will transfer the beautiful leaf markings onto his body. As a result, Inktomi is burnt to a crisp.

The questions that follow for contemplation are: Have you ever considered the role of self-hate in your life? Has it ever gotten to the point where you were so consumed that it threatened your existence? Pairing fables with questions is intended to have the reader examine their own lives, with friends, a counsellor, or in a group environment. The intent is to assist the reader in their own personal journey to awareness (xiii). Harris mentions that few readers will choose to answer all the questions. However, what is important is to find the one question that allows you to think and perhaps see aspects of the story you may have overlooked (151).

Ann Dixie also explains how she has incorporated this book into her own clinical practice, which is involved with women recovering from mental health issues and substance abuse in Toronto. Dixie meets with a group of women weekly for a writing workshop where stories are read and reflected upon. She explains that through the process of identifying with and empathizing with the stories' characters. Her patients can safely confront life-challenges that would otherwise be daunting.

In *Performing Human through Animal*, I borrow from both Harris and Dixon's approaches of stimulating dialogue through contemplation of fables. I attempt to create works that can possibly allow the viewer to identify and empathize with the allegory presented. The dual meanings of allegory make it suitable for both the young and old to reflect on as viewers, each bringing their own lived experiences to interpretations of the artwork.

Seventeenth century philosopher and physician John Locke also supports sharing allegories with both children and adults. In his writings, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Locke mentions that a child could benefit by learning how to read an illustrated version of Aesop's Fables, particularly the versions with illustrations, because the child would feel a sense of encouragement through the pleasure of learning. The knowledge gained through the fables will also influence them into adulthood. Locke states that, as adults, we also have the opportunity to bring our own lived experience to re-interpret the messages of these stories (section 156).

I introduce Matteo Gilebbi, professor of literature and philosophy here, in order to bring an opposing perspective on the use of animals in expressing human experiences.

Gilebbi's concerns are viewed through the lens of the "Animal Question," a philosophical debate that erodes the sharp division between Humans and Animals.

Gilebbi's concerns call into question a widely accepted anthropocentric belief, that all non-human animals are inferior to humans, which justifies the discriminatory practices by humans against other species (93).

Gillebi argues that the presence of animal figures in literature have not always served to pose the animal question in an ontological sense. Animals have been used primarily as symbols, metaphors, and allegorical figures that help define human qualities, feelings, or behaviors (Pg. 94). Gilebbi states that in some cases, animal imagery exceeds its rhetorical function. He cites Mario Luzi as a poet that moves away from symbolic representation of the animal and into a more "natural reality" (Gillebi). In Luizi's poem *Baptism*, Gillebi identifies a connection between animal and man that goes beyond metaphor and links them by their biological existence (94). Being human means being one of many species inhabiting the biosphere, with no particular privilege, prestige, or superiority, so that speciesism can be considered specious, presumptuous, and illogical (Gilebbi 94). "And / then how can one accept, / how can one even think / that I have what the breakstones do not have / or the fire flies or the carps, / or even the poor human animal / dispirited and drained / on a bed in a convalescent hospital, / nor the rest which matures with us / through matter's single common process." (Batism). Gilebbi argues that in this poem the animal question is used to stimulate an analysis of human-animal interaction, making the reader reflect on how animals are used to define human identity, or expose speciesism. Gilebbi believes that the use of animal imagery has potential to

raise animal questions (94).

Revisiting Aesop's illustrated fables as an adult along with my three-year-old reinforces Gilebbi's "Animal Question." It's common for my son to ask questions, pointing to the figures of the stories. "Dad, why does the fox like to steal, just like Swiper?" In response, I said; "A long time ago when people started building houses, animals like the fox lost their homes and food. So, when they saw people had food the animals would find their way into the house and eat the food. For the animal this was not stealing. They were just hungry. But because people got angry they said that all foxes steal. Maybe that's why today we have stories with the fox stealing, because its humans telling the story".

My son was connecting the fox role in Aesop's *The Fox and the Crow* to the cartoon Dora the Explorer, where a fox character named Swiper is also presented as constantly stealing. The dialogue that took place between my son and I, reinforces Locke's argument that when adults revisit fables, we can discover new reinterpretations and perspectives.

When I started the IAMD program at OCAD University, I had initial questions involving the representation of the animal in literature and their accompanying visual illustrations. My research began by revisiting the stories and illustrations of Aesop's Fables. They were of interest for the literary tropes of anthropomorphic characters used to speak to human circumstances. Through this research I arrived at the realization that my focus was not in the representation of the animals, but in the ability of fables to

engage the reader to reflect on their own life challenges through allegory. On the one hand *Performing Human through Animal* is an allegory inviting the viewer to reflect on human experience through traditional animal-based narrative. On the other hand, the sculptures can stimulate reflections on how animals are used to define human experience.

CHAPTER 3: EPILOGUE

Reflections

Since installing *Performing Human through Animal* at YYZ Artist Outlet, I have had the opportunity to reflect on this body of work. As with all artworks, there is a difference between the earlier “mental images” and the final work, just as there are gaps between the multiple iterations and versions of the drawings, mock-ups and video sketches that have resulted in the realized versions of Pig and Rabbit. Below are some of my post exhibition thoughts.

The addition of using my own body and the medium of video for sketches has opened to new sensory experiences with clay. Up until this experiment, I primarily used clay to sculpt recognizable imagery, a process heavily dependent on observation. In this video sketch, I served as the armature for what I was sculpting, re-contextualizing my approach to clay. The use of recorded visual perspectives and the reliance on tactility brought me closer to my seven-year-old self and created a new way of knowing clay, which renewed my confidence and commitment to the material. Speaking allegorically, the clay, which was an old friend that I had intimately known for a long time suddenly revealed another aspect of its personality.

The video sketches allowed me to closely observe myself from a different perspective, bringing me closer to examining the Animal Question in ways that my literary research had not provided. Reviewing the videos connected me with the memory of the visceral and physical experience, making me more mindful and empathetic of Gilebbi's concerns of viewing animals only from a human point of view.

The residency in Italy also led me to bodily sensory experiences in a different way, through consuming food. This research proved critical in the creation of the allegorical spectacle of my exhibition. It allowed me to link uncontrollable desire for food to substance abuse, motivating me to research food as new materials outside of my skill sets. Close consultation with a baker, a tile setter and a seamstress' exposed me to crossing into uncharted waters and to the fabrication of the three-tiered cake upon which the rabbit sits.

Italy also served as a direct source to further studying how written narratives were depicted in sculptural works and paintings, so that non-literate people could access meaning through symbolism. It is important to also note that the visual, unlike the written, transcends language and translation. Given my own challenges with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and our educational system's lack of emphasis on visual literacy, I turned to this ancient method of storytelling and the accessibility of the visual for my production method. *Performing Human through Animal* is anchored in these traditions, but uses mass-produced objects, such as the

garbage can and oversized cake to shift the discourse to critiques of contemporary culture.

It was pleasing to see that viewers were able to relate to the humour and tension in the work. The distorted gestures that pig and rabbit find themselves in can reflect how, when people find themselves in uncomfortable positions, both emotionally and physically, they often resort to humour for relief, the kind of laughter that comes from embarrassment or alarm rather than amusement.

My goal was to make the work approachable through humour with the hope that this invitation would create spaces for exploring their own relationships with desire through the allegorical sculptures. The juxtaposition of the animals' distorted bodies and their happy facial expressions is intended to be contradictory. Pain and pleasure find a meeting point in my work. This is a fundamental aspect in the allegorical meaning and making of the work.

The tension held in each of the sculptures is further externally replicated in the tension of the dialogue between the self-pleasuring, bent neck rabbit and contorted pig. While there is an ambiguity about the rabbit's posture, there is clarity in the impossibility of the pig's pose. This exploration of the borders between necessity and excess is at the heart of my exploration both in my thinking and making. Future works will continue to engage and unpack this balancing act.

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