

Adrian Holt

“UNKRND: Welcome to the SNKR SHOP”

Spring 2023

Drawing Departments

Visual Arts

Cleveland Institute of Art

BFA Thesis Paper

Committee Members:

Sarah Kabot (Department Head)

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Biography

Adrian Holt, an evolving artist. Graduate from Cleveland institute of Art; I paint, hand draw, conduct digital designs, and customize shoes. The overall element in the outcomes of my work are a narrative script or a reflection of current popular culture ,which more often or not attains success, status, or wealth, due to my own observations. My current focus is the practice of custom shoes as it has established itself as an unconventional form of canvas in my eyes. It has also in the recent decade, exploded in population growth as a community with the invention of social media platforms. With icons and celebrities rocking them, the streetwear and high fashions scene have opened up space for customs. Customizing personalizes a pair of shoes for the wearer. Having an expensive pair of my own is what made me join this community and clue myself into the billion dollar sneaker culture. Resulting from this interest, my recent body of work for my BFA consists of customized shoes depicting food brandings with the revolving themes and associations.

CV/Resume

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Education

2019 - 2023 (Anticipated)

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH

Drawing degree with an emphasis in Painting

Group Exhibition

2020

Student Independent Exhibition 75, Reinberger Gallery, Cleveland, OH

2021

100 Show, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH

2022

Watch Our Language, Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, OH

Awards/Honors

2018 - 2019

Best Male Artist of the Year, Lee's Summit North High School, MO

2019 - 2023

CIA Gund Family Scholarship

Short Artist Statement

Adrian Holt

Artist Statement - 2023

Unkrowned pairs the witty tactics of 80s and 90s hype culture with a critical exploration of material value, social class, and collective memory. Hype culture creates demand through brand collaborations, exclusive drops, and viral marketing. With its roots in streetwear and skate subcultures, the marketing strategy of the collaboration or “collab” is now a favorite among luxury brands. “Collabs” are a cross-pollination and intermingling of varying consumer bases that expand the audience which in turn contributes to the growing authority within each party represented.

My BFA project utilizes the aspects of brand collaborations to emphasize how worth is determined through overlapping processes of public perception and visual culture. By working exclusively with Champion shoes, I aim to build on the company’s nostalgic revival.

Once considered a value brand, Champion is now embarking on a comeback journey gaining respect in streetwear and athleisure spaces. The loved underdog plot is invoked, which contributes to the success of the unofficial partnership. I cultivate that underdog narrative by customizing Champion sneakers with depictions of mischievous to dear right outlandish alternative food brands. Humor is an essential part of the work in many facets. From the use of food, a direct tie to consumerism, to the tags in the Instagram posts I make for the shoes, the work becomes humorous in its illusion of candidness. I transform the sneaker silhouette into a sculptural art piece through a layered hand painted process that replicates product packaging. Completed and wrapped pieces mimic factory produced goods. These unsanctioned sneaker-snack collabs remind viewers of their beloved comfort foods, offer a sense of security in familiarity, and provide enticing content that audiences feel good sharing.

Through more premium sneaker releases, I make up for Champion's underwhelming shoe department. The work gains credibility through the multimedia campaigns I’ve created. Through the construction of a novelty pop-up sneaker store, I pay homage to the sneakerheads who carried the culture forward while elaborating on the similarities between the commerce and art space. The store is that one-to-one comparison. The framing of my work is influenced by graffiti ideology and calls attention to collaborations’ influence. Having the foundation of my work be a sneaker allows access to diverse communities and neighborhoods. The wearable pieces operate as luxury goods, transferring hype as visual status to their future owners. The shoes become wearable pieces of art that, like the train, stays in motion, visiting segments of society the gallery walls would otherwise not meet.

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Thesis + Introduction

As a former uncultured artist in the shoe space, I've manifested great appreciation of the culture with all the aspects that made it and keep it functioning. I've become a well cultured member of the sneaker community meaning I've taken the initiative of sorting through the mindsets of the average sneakerhead and shoe fanatic that persists in this realm. I've often wondered about the infatuation of the classic Jordan series and with that shoes in general. My curiosity has always extended as far as surface level even with walking databases within my peripherals. Privy to this acknowledgment, this project has become a testament to fulfilling my own curiosity. It's taken the guise of initiation and has provided fortification within one of its sects. With an artistic ability as a visual artist, I have taken solitude within the customizing community, adorning it as a title and adopting its practice. In my current exhibition, I utilize this art as the prime agency to execute the production of every shoe's design that can be witnessed on display. Prior to my graduation from Cleveland institute of Art, I would absorb two aspects of my existence that would lead to my current exhibition. The first was the embrace of popular culture in my work creating narratives that entertained achieving status and wealth. Hidden in the background of my work were ties to contemporary existence and consumerism's role. The second aspect became my real time observations of companies like Champion and New Balance garnering more traction to their brand and in turn a shift in their placement in society. The public perception changed and with it their value has inclined.

I've been a subscriber of the rags to riches story and during my years lived, I've witnessed Champion's own execution of this. Having worn Champions during my Highschool years, avoiding negative comments from my peers, I've become well aware of how shoes have

now become a commodity of status. With my interest aligned, I was forced to ask the simple question why. How did this occur and can I do it too? My body of work is formulated from this bet with myself. Involving myself in customizing resulted from similar premises, a bet. I said, “I can do that and I can do it better”. The same applies here. What made Nike or Jordan special, putting them at the top. I propose my answer through the action of replication. This replication is the bet, ultimately saying, “oh, well they're not as special as one may assume”. It’s only grown, cultivating itself into a conversation of hypotheticals, associations, and rhetorical arguments. It became my recording of all the background research done and a celebration of the culture I take part in. The work is packaged small as a wrapped Champion brand shoe with layered paint printed on the surface by hand. It communicates the internal workings of capitalism in the form of an art gallery performance. At the core of this commercial reaction is hype. It’s a social currency that is shared among humans only given out through demand and attention. It’s the essence of collaborations which turns discount store brands into designer fashion brands; having enough social pressure behind it to cause a mass change in public perception, behavior, and class. Using the shoe as my canvas, I create hypothetical narratives capitalizing on Champion’s comeback in public status through nostalgia and streetwear. Riding the bandwagon of Champion’s fresh hype, I pair the brand with discontinued restaurant chains/ knockoff food brands. The use of alternative versions was to fulfill the need of non-recognizable brands. It was the necessary ingredient to a traditionally successful collab: one brand with more hype or more recognized crossovers with a brand less recognized to create diversity, creativity, and limited editions. It results in the mixing of audience and expansion of frontiers desired to come about. At the very least, yet to be perceived. They took on a subverting role, undermining the established brand's presence as being special. The food aspect becomes a direct tie to consumerism seeing

that the basis of human nature's desire to consume relates to food. With sources such as *Coming to America*, It also becomes the gateway to the humor of the work. Installed and displayed in a pop up store setting, the work is marketed as genuine products that have been sanctioned and released

History of Personal Practice + Work

To relive the come up of the current body of works debuting to the public, I invite the reader to examine the curiosity that was noted and bookmarked prior to 2019. The social circles that revolved around me as the artists, brought the conversation of shoes to the courtroom. Instead of adopting the interest in collecting and investing into Jordan's, I focused on the cultural stigma that shoes carried and its differentiation from certain pairs to certain pairs. This dormant interest would later yield to the success of the Stewie Griffin's: First Day of School, 2022. Claimed as dormant, it would take a three year gap before activating it so proper investment could be made. Within that gap I would discover the practice of customizing shoes, but what took priority was a time sink in grasping technical skills that pertained to drawing. It would later expand to painting but drawing was the set foundation. In 2019, "Dorm Life" was produced from graphite. The work depicts an ordinary landscape of the internal environment of a college dorm. Sectioned off to the kitchen space, a counter holding the objects: a closed carton of a dozen eggs, a medium sized frying pan hidden behind the eggs, and a metallic toaster plugged into the wall at a further distance, and a cleanex container at the forefront. Off to the right in the back were picture frames. It is a still life that when observed up close can be recognized to be covered in a stylized value application. In repeated sessions, I marked the symbol of the crown on the paper, using it as what would dictate the shading. This early work exemplified the quality of technique skill I was seeking at its basic form. This became my mission because visually replicating the realism style was quite an interest to me in hindsight of potential future endeavors. This would bring about works such as "Financial Crisis" in 2020 and "Steve: A coffee loving man" in 2022. What made "Financial Crisis" special was the introduction of narrative in my work. The work

became an allegory. It was a representation of a told story of a husband and father that finds himself at the bottom of the bottle facing the reality of the household that he is in charge of about to fall off a cliff to meet its end. Bringing in narrative brought along the ability to look at differing perspectives from my own and think outside the box. Once I expanded into other materials and mediums, I carried over the narrative elements and repurposed the original passion of skill development resulting in “School Supplies” to be made in 2021 and “The Map of the Soul” in 2021. What allowed this to flourish was the consumption of popular culture which really became an impacting influence. In regards to “School Supplies” what’s to be noted is my influence becoming more inclusive to contemporary events. For this piece, it referenced the rise of school shootings and for “Steve” it was the progression of AI in current times. Using a website, randomly AI generated characters are created with every refresh. It spawned a four part series with “Steve” being the first iteration. Prior to “Steve” at the end of 2021, my two part Wonderbread series, inspired by the rise of NFT’s was digitally crafted. This series rekindled the previous infatuation stated at the start, specifically the “Wonderbread Shoe”. This artwork adopted the appearance of the average NFT, but what it was expressing was the idea of restoring relevance; attributing value back to a brand that lost its spotlight. I exemplified my thought through the theory of collaboration. Collaborations is a marketing strategy that made me a witness to many other entities' profitable success. A brief moment of a crossover of two or more brands that would merge audiences and initiate conversations is what it was. It is very much prevalent in sneaker culture and, at the time, I was well aware of the customizing side of shoe culture, yet I was on a hiatus from participation. Later half of 2022 experienced my quick return to working with shoes but I held on to what the Timberland boots contributed to the work. Not only did it provide its established recognition in the public eye but it gave relevancy to the

context leading up to the shoe's current public standing. The similarities between my idea and the shoe's historical context established supporting arguments in my favor and prevailed as a success as the theoretical first step in bringing my comical bet to fruition. Following along with this marketing concept, "Kanye Bear" in early 2022 is materialized, furthering my relationship with branding, collaboration, painting, narrative, and popular culture. My personal branding is first introduced here, recognizing promotion of the self being intrinsic to building an audience. The main take away from the work was content creation itself. In an abstract form, It was my realization on the impact of current events and mainstream narratives on content production whether by hand or in media. Recollection of observing YouTube videos and blogs being made to cover controversy over Kanye and Will Smith, which the work refers to, caught my attention. Aside from, in the creative side of the internet, artworks from drawings to sculptural were created due to controversy of real people or fictional characters. Keeping this thought in mind and understanding it's effect within shoe culture, we find ourselves circling back to the "Stewie Griffins: First Day of School". The character was iconic and within the community pairs of similar interest were being produced and shared. Trying my hand at it, I utilized the low top Air Force 1s as the canvas. It was the AF1s that made it successful. It brought the factor of a unique canvas to create on. But more importantly, it brought its cultural stigma that fed into the personality of the referred character. Acknowledging the drug dealing, gang relations, violent and suspicious nature tied to the shoe, allowed a more complementary pairing compared to most shoe collabs. In "The Hood's Continental" 2022, I finally delved deeper into this phenomenon, shoe stigmas and its social effect. While an honorable mention to my current body of work, it instilled the significance of knowing a shoes past and how it accentuates the overall story which

can contribute to the value of the curated piece. What section of the story must be told is what must be decided.

Historic Context

A lot of chatter about underrepresentation has circulated within society, and shoes in the art realm are no exception. In my art installation, I'm bringing both sides together for a meeting. In doing so, being an artist, I must reflect on the history of my work within the description of the art world to justify such a meeting of similarities. An obvious movement I reference is pop art and some of its major players, starting with Roy Lichtenstein.

Post discovery, around the 1960s, Roy Lichtenstein would vocalize to the public one of his triggers that allowed for the new world of pop art to be documented. He struggled to answer the question of what constituted art and its acceptance. Through his twenties till his forties', Lichtenstein would discipline his hand to grasp the understanding of the artist he took inspiration from and in hope conjure a formal quality compatible to him. Failed attempts and gallery rejections were his fate. Lichtenstein would try his hand at the stubborn abstract expressionist to no avail. The set stage for his style to develop came about through setting a new trend; a new precedent. He reflected the culture society had adopted to full effect at the time in the gallery space. It was the everyday pleasures of commerce consumption. Appropriating the comic book style, he invited popular culture from the commercial environment into the art space, asking "why can't I exist here, look, aren't I good too". Lichtenstein and my work differ in the blatant sense. A direct one on one comparison is challenged with a heated cross examination. Lichtenstein's paintings adhere to the traditional showing up on a canvas to be hung and displayed within such an art institution. Its physical functional demands are limited to a predescribed section of real estate, the gallery space. My work has no obligation to live in such spaces, deemed to be considered art regardless, yet can simultaneously have a practical function.

Lichtenstein relies on the reflected theory of what was known as the present time to shoulder the burden of causing a movement. Whereas Lichtenstein's function tackles the psychological, my pieces do the same but with the additional physical element. Having my work adhere to the dimensional form of a shoe, it allows for the brain synapses to recall the idea of freedom, because both the connotations and denotation derived from seeing a shoe converge on movement, travel, comfort, and utility. This is not innate with a canvas. A canvas is stagnant. It has no choice. A shoe has a choice. Freedom resides in having a choice. Like stated previously, my shoes enjoy the benefits of traversing space and realms, physical and theoretically, while holding the title as art. This really does speak on the power of readymades and how they don't overwrite its commercial function but adds on. The words movement and boundlessness gifts the observer the perspective of the artist's view on the discretion of its use and the ideology of traveling art. The kinetic function of the shoe allows for a wider reach of eyes; a marketing scheme of brand promotion; a greater dynamic on public interactivity; and an opposition to the art world's gallery scene. While we both rotate around the banality of the commerce world and its mass production, our depiction differs. A simple example would be "*Look Mickey*", 1961[1] where he copied and repurposed the illustrations of a comic book. You can really derive the growing influence popular culture was gaining but if informed comics, they too were being mass produced to fulfill the consumer base of readers' content. Multiple sessions of prints and editions being made to be disseminated. Shoes and packaged snacks are the equivalent for me. In Lichtenstein's earlier work of his pop art career(1961 - 1965), he appropriated comics and magazines which he would then transfer to the canvas after the alterations of their formal qualities, not their identity, "*Whaam!*", 1963[2]. In my work, an appropriation also can be witnessed. I adopt shoes, specifically Champion brand shoes, and alter the surface quality and

image for a personal concept and style indication. I do this by using the assortment of paint, dyes, tape, and stencils. All if used creates a multilayered end result across the surface of the shoe. Changing colors and imposing shapes, patterns, and text. A new makeover. I present the imagery of food/restaurant chain brands. My commercial marketing goes further to involve the alternative versions or discontinued brands. His choice of image becomes a distinct and obvious reflection of what society at the time was adopting as the dominant culture, advertisements, commercial goods, and popular culture sources/icons. In this statement begins the process of acknowledging the similarities that both artists have. Both Lichtenstein and I follow the idea of transforming the object or in his case the image which intentionally references mass produced content as the justification for the age of advertisements and mass consumption. Pop art consistently refers to the use of found objects. Why that is the fundamental level, Lichtenstein didn't believe that to be the case, since for him he was transforming the objects originality qualities thus exchanging credits of originality. In the midst of doing so, both artists' quality of work reflects the nature of removing the artist's hand; leaving potentially a mechanical look. Lichtenstein produced paintings that had a flat surface like a print. It was devoid of expressive marks and limited imperfections. Like a factory print his lines were crisp, bold, and sharp. He took himself out of it so the work can hold the spotlight. He was naturally a shy and introverted personality and it was reflected in his rendering. He preferred to be in the background having his art do the talking. Pumping out works like a machine. I paint Champion shoes in a way that makes them believable as a mass produced item. The goal of the quality is always "factory finish". Keeping it seamless and clean fulfills the adopted philosophy of what a successful custom is. It's a custom that causes people to question if it was produced in a factory. To appear with limited hints of alterations. With that in mind, the Mass production element that attributes

itself to consumer culture becomes prevalent but what brings the observer's thoughts back would be the humor element that both works consist of. The focus of the humor may be directed slightly differently, one more so at the precedent of what is considered art and the other a hypothetical thought brought to reality, but the humor is there the same. In *Masterpiece* (1962)[3], Lichtenstein achieved this through the style, scenario, but especially the text he incorporated. The text read, "why, Brad, Darling This is a Masterpiece. My son, soon you'll have all the New York Clamoring over your work!". All suggesting a new time period and a new innovation in the art space to fond over. In *Duffin Dageel X Champion* [27], I placed the recognized color scheme of Dunkin: the bright, inviting, and playful colors, and collaged them on a shoe. It makes it bold causing it to stand out in a strikingly weird way. Furthering the weirdness is realizing that, told with text, that it's not Dunkin but instead Duffin Dageels. Then, coming to realization that it is real but, instead, an alternative version of Dunkin, elicits more comedic value. Each shoe is split down the middle in the orange and magenta combination. This includes the back tab. The tongues is consistent in the magenta color. The shoe laces are replaced with similar colors yet each shoe is rocking the opposing color of the other. The "C" logo was converted to have the same color scheme. The sock liner turned mocha brown from white. Each of the five panels that exist on the shoes are made to mimic the characteristics of the donuts sold in their establishment. The flavors are dictated by the colors used and lastly top with white frosting. Each donut panel is finished with a higher sheen than others. The midsoles reference the caramel used while the soles refer to the coffee. To supplement, the silhouette is already one that is not used to attention or creativity, so such a makeover with Champion sparks interest only expressive through a smile; a smirk, a laugh. Stating all this, the viewer can start to take note of the overlap that tends to occur between my work and pop art as a movement. Including branding;

using bright vivid colors; referencing advertisements; referencing mass production; highlighting consumption of consumer goods, and appropriation of existing items/goods. Closing the gap of both art space and commerce; it all comes together to intersect like a Venn diagram.

With my practice favoring the pop art scene and having mentioned one of pop arts biggest contributors, Andy Warhol would be the next logical historic influence around my work. The forged mechanical intervention to represent the mass production shared between Liechtenstein and I is similarly shared with Warhol. Lichtenstein's removal of his presence in his work, resulting in his machine-like formal qualities, was further endorsed due to the circumstances of his limited media presence. He had no interest in knowing the value of being a public figure. Having his identity potentially harboring space for the work to thrive didn't align with him, so he removed himself which complemented the work he would go on to make. Lichtenstein's found art style became his brand.

For Warhol, his media presence was detrimental. His public appearances at exhibitions, parties, events, and features in magazines or documentaries all concocted his media presence. It made the name Andy Warhol a brand and I believe that for him it only contributed to his work. Him becoming a public figure influenced his extra interaction with the booming commerce world with its goods, products, and marketing. It also warped the value seen in his work in his favor. It yielded in more eyes on him, meaning more opportunities for public involvement; meaning more consideration to what was being shown; meaning new ideas and more experimentation. Andy Warhol, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, grew up on home school art lessons and the windows into the world of Hollywood, popular culture magazines. Warhol's fascination for the lifestyle of the famous and the desired permeated to his adult years. His public appearances from walking the streets, signing autographs or his visits to exhibitions of other

artists like Claes Oldenburg with *The Store* [13][14] in 1991 made his face his brand. His media appearance in *66 Scenes from America*, a Danish documentary showing excerpts of American reality, where he eats a Burger King burger in silence is the quintessential example of this in action. His self-promotion would cause the accelerated growth of an audience and hype around his work. Burger King would later use the clip as a commercial to run in the Super Bowl. By the time *The Factory* was established from 1963 to 1987, Warhol grew accustomed to his earned status. He already knew the importance of such antics like timing the releases of his paintings which he did with works like *Jackie* (1963)[4] and *Liz Taylor* (1964)[5]. With *The Factory* (“The Factory”) doubling as his studio and a hot spot for parties that artists and celebrities frequented, his brand grew. His image surpassed his work, yet the demand for it grew simultaneously in the artworld. The ideology inflicted in his growth, intentional or not, is a dominant premise with my shoe line. I myself have taken the steps to incorporate elements of commercial marketing and self brand promotion in the overall exhibition of my work. With the inclusion of promotional posters, social media platforms, and monitors displaying video advertisements, the idea of status and hype gets enforced more so. For Warhol, being famous played into his fulfillment of highlighting celebrity culture. His silkscreened paintings were a reflection of what he saw in society and proceeded to give a visual showing of reproduction’s power both in our mass reproduced media consumption and in eliciting a narrative. It optimized Warhol’s ability to paint pictures of money. We can recall Warhol’s Coca Cola[3] [6] painting in 1962; or *Ambulance Disaster* (1963-64) [7] where he utilized the screen printing technique to create either multiple iterations of the image or swap the imperfections of his hand with the perfection of the mechanical process. The process tended to touch on the commodification of what was presented to us in the local news. The iterations mainly reflected the severity of the topic while slowing

down time for better observation. Our divergence appears in *Hydrox X Champion* [28]. In a men's size 11, the shoe is a low profile silhouette rocking the "C" logo in the outer mid panel and Champion text patterned throughout the sock liner. Originally all white pleather, it has been dominated with more blue tones with sections of green, red, brown, and yellow. Text and image patterns were added around the surface of the shoe. The pattern among the brown represents the texture and pattern of the cookie. This occupies three sections around the shoe. The pattern among the blue represents the packaging which refers to a flower that has ties to meaning purity. Purity is what gives Hydrox its name as to say it's all organic. This pattern occupies the middle panel of both sides of the shoe. Stripped patterns of two blue tones are consistent through the surface of the shoe, mimicking packaging. Recognizing Leaf as the contributor to bring Hydrox back, its green logo is represented on the two back panels of each shoe. The midsoles turned blue with a dark blue shade for the splatter effect. The laces converted to a reddish color. It's my preferred canvas. With it I, to a degree, implement mechanisms to imitate factory quality. I use a printer to design and create my stencils which I pair with my airbrush to decrease the likelihood of brush marks. A flat print is the goal in mind, just like a factory. For this shoe, it was done with all the text around the shoe. The rest of the labor was done by hand but when it came to the execution of factory finish, the last few layers around the shoe by airbrush added protection plus a change of the material texture. The sheen was adjusted and the feel became silky smooth rather than waxy plastic. Our process is different along with our mentality within the process. Andy had the habit of embracing the mistakes that would occur in his screen printing process. He treated it almost as if it was intentional. I'm the opposite and in *Hydrox X Champion* [28], I expect the viewer to grasp a level of tightness and control about the work. An obvious difference coincides with what we choose to depict and, for me, It's items whose perceived worth are less than the

staples they emulate. Exhibit A is Hydrox, 1st sandwich cookie made, illustrated by the number 1 towards the front on the exterior side and the text “America’s Original” towards the backside, which were shoved under the rug by Oreos. Exhibit B is Champion, who are only recently experiencing a comeback due to streetwear and celebrity brand collaborations. Supreme gave them the push mid 2000s then Vetements located in Europe and so on. Pocketing itself as Athleisure wear, you now have celebs wearing Champion on the off days. Chance the Rapper, Kanye West, etc. Champion now has a level of hype behind its name that hasn’t been seen in decades. Under the illusion of canon, I fracture together a collectible with investment value. The showcasing becomes the pitch to a hypothetical reality to ask how far off is it from being realistic. As an additional detail, the research done is validated through the incorporation of the background information of the alternative food brands.

In a broad sense I've hired myself as a reporter here to document and report my observations. It's a relatable venture that me and Warhol shared. Even his protege, Jean-Michel Basquiat. Dying at the age 27, he stands as another historical influence. Basquiat's reporting was enacted on a broader premise. He reacts to the present and proceeds to project those different aspects of reality onto the canvas. Like a sponge he soaks up pop culture and details of life he himself observed function. Painting in an uncaring, simplified and naive way, Basquiat creates compact complexities that leave one struggling on what exactly of a documentary narrative did he collage together. It becomes this magnifying glass of his own observation of his existence and the culture that interacted with him through the five senses. Basquiat's work has been scribed with symbols and references to influences in his life. The painting *The Death of Michael Stewart* [8] also known as *Defacement* (1983)[8] is an example that bears witness to the influence of his race, environment, and his circle of friends. It was a response to an incident that transpired in his

backyard, New York. Headlined as a brutal display of police brutality, the young black victim left beaten and deceased had ties to his friend group. Stricken with grief and contempt, Basquiat would construct a 25 in x 30 in canvas depicting two pink face policemen in blue uniform, one with sharp predator teeth, with batons clobbering a black silhouette. The black silhouette shows no features. It's non-specific, making it interchangeable for the demographic that fit. Done in Acrylic and marker, the piece is at no loss of expressive marks and lines. Other works expressed signs of religion, money, culture, human nature, anatomy, and so on. An example of this would be *Skull* (1981)[9] that depicts a blown up idea of a black child's head in front of a white background dominated by a yin and yang of blue and orange color. Using acrylic and crayon, the head is being viewed from a diagonal angle with X-ray vision. A cross section of the head is sectioned out. Therein lies inferences of sutures and skeletal structures. Due to his early experiences hospitalized, he gravitated to perusing anatomy books which have taken a stake in his works. Expressed in *Baptism* (1982)[10] the work also tackles religion. The two figures are identified by the dark color of the skin and the summarized anatomy features of each figure. Inferred to be a body of water, the left figure stands on top exuding peace as the halo above flashes. The opposing figure is seen sunken in the water yet engulfed in panic and flames. His work is done with no bounds on freedom because he sees no limitation in what can be added to the canvas; to the discussion. What synergizes so well with his thought process during creation is his stylistic choice. It's crude, unrefined, childlike, "primitive", and unregulated but it made it the most organic and authentic option. It too had no limitations, so it brought out the best in Basquiat which was to overwhelm his chosen canvas with pages of information simplified to hold more information. His visual language encompassed figures of humans, animals, objects, and structures. Words and sentences imported in the work, yet organized like a blueprint layout. 50

cent Piece (1983)[11] for example. Congested in similar fashion to a chalkboard in college mathematics. He was a student of life and it seemed as though his “canvas” was his sketchbook for notes, quotes, and questions. Mistakenly similar to carelessness, his impulse to intuitively create and not think, illustrates his performance on the canvas. It’s intense and passionate. Our work is very different. Where Basquiat reveals his fruitful study of life, my work illustrates a tightly limited segment of my own life observation if put into comparison. First, pointing out the obvious, I prioritize shoes as a consistent surface. This approach carries a more direct message that informs the viewer that the shoe game and culture are framing devices that set the ambience of the install environment. The same can't be said for Basquiat, not that he wouldn't if given the chance, but once again, he allowed for no limitation. Every surface was viable to use as a foundation. Looking at *Snipers x Champion* [29], we can understand just by the finished quality of the shoe, that our process that aligns with our outlook for the work, which inevitably molds our outcome, stands at opposite ends. The surface appears flat. Limited shine. The shapes of color and design, similar to its counterpart Snickers, resembles mechanical print if not intimately up close. Instead of a compacted surface area with scribbles, doodles, and coded glyphics, the work follows the rules of a coloring book. Neat, spacious enough, and no crossing of the lines. Repeated ideas of peanuts wrap around the surface with gooey caramel or nougat dripping between them. The golden brown color used causes them to stand front and center. Appropriating a shoe, it is painted at a considerably petite scale. At size 11, its dimensions are 12 inches x 5.5 inches x 3.6 inches. I refrain from utilizing his overlapping formal qualities, instead, I’ve given each element room to breath. I’ve rejected the human imperfections for mechanical perfection. My artistic expression is the product of the process. The conversation we both have with the audience differ in subject matters and associations. Very different, yet similarities still unfold in

our work but also in our thinking. Basquiat, like Warhol, during pre-social media, had an interest in notoriety and with his non discriminatory relationship with his art surfaces, graffiti came effortlessly. Basquiat's art style fell more in line with his graffiti counterparts. With his personal art style and being one half of the SAMO tagging in Brooklyn, NY, I believe he aided greatly in bridging the space between street art and gallery art. With the airbrush as my spray can, I do the same with sneaker culture, commerce, and the art world. I use stencils to print images and words. Some follow suit to the original branding while others serve the purpose of giving hints to entice the viewer to understand its reason for placement, a similar fashion to Basquiat.

For Basquiat and other taggers, it was reaching an audience that the art society disregarded. They were the crowd that for whatever reason rarely if ever appeared within the gallery walls. The audience that knows the world as far as the city limits. The ones who have abandoned homes as tourist attractions. The ones whose artforms did not fit gallery requisites. He interacted with demographic areas with varying social class through the slogans made. He brought the same conversation he'd expect to suggest in the art society to the general public. The working class. He was sharing his thoughts and ideas at the heart of communities. The hoods and slums. He was also very concentrated on being a known figure. Taggers wanted to get their names out there and be remembered. Taggers would achieve this by placing them in subways, trains, and buildings. Subway carts and trains were fascinating cause they were always in motion; traveling to different jurisdictions of class. Basquiat partook in this community exercise. It procured opportunities through connections made. He received a return on his investments upon meeting Andy Warhol. When his friendship with Warhol became public, collaborations between the two were made. They produced an assortment of works together like *Arm and Hammer II* (1985)[12], where Warhol would print a familiar detergent logo in pairs on a wood

foundation and Basquiat would deface the left one. To resemble a different symbol gave the work ties to jazz and black culture. They challenged each other in their working process. The chemistry between them was great. Once they opened the doors to a public exhibition showcasing their endeavors, a switch of atmosphere occurred. It brought attention but it caused tension. It yielded negative feedback from the press. It brought self doubt on a young mind who was already battling a drug addiction causing more conflict amongst built relationships. This attention, though, did later on shift his social status and attributed monetary value to his work. He took a style and a movement that was considered trash and gave it a price tag of millions. The framing of my work takes influence with the graffiti ideology and calls attention to collaborations' influence. Having the foundation of my work be a sneaker allows access to diverse communities and neighborhoods. It becomes a wearable piece of art that, like the train, stays in motion, visiting segments of society the gallery walls would otherwise not meet.

If we were to lace up our shoes and visit these areas the gallery knows not of, we would come across the work, if fortunate, of a man who also practices within this public space of accessibility and commodity. Another historical reference. Claus Oldenburg.

Having humor in my work does more benefits within the work than without it. The humor element can be potent enough to potentially be the net that catches most of the audience's gaze and be the rope that binds them to be present among what is being shown. It's healthy and an exquisite reminder of how to go about looking around one's self and the culture permitted to be abundant in the time of one's brief existence. Claus Oldenburg willingly professes that humor is a psychological material that goes hand in hand within his work, if not at least embedded in. Oldenburg is recorded mentioning how humor is good for oneself, specifically in his work in which he uses the term "serious play"("USA Artists") when describing his monuments. The line,

“Life is a form of serious play”, and that there’s no honest monuments(“The Oversized Pop Art of Claes Oldenburg”), personally signals the message that there is a thought process and objective being represented with a finalized work. You can start the conversation with your evidence as you choose but keep it fun and interesting for a wider audience to come together to be involved. For Oldenburg and I, our thought process, in regards to the audience’s relationship between our work created and deposited into the public eye, resembles one another in this category. A further example to support this claim would be the observations of Oldenburg’s gigantic piece “*Spoonbridge and Cherry*” (1988)[15] and mine, *OFC x Champion*.[30]

Spoonbridge and Cherry [15], located at Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, is 9 m x 4.1 m x 15.7 m. It is made out of stainless steel and aluminum. It's a visual display of an oversized spoon that holds a bright red cherry fixed in place along the brim of the spoon. Doubling as a bridge spanning the gap between plots of land, the spoon is attributed with two additional functionalities. The last being a tourist attraction to orbit a crowd of onlookers. The viewer comes to the work as a pleasant surprise obstructing the premonitions built around the object's identifiable formal qualities. The viewer doesn't come to the work saying this makes sense but to enjoy why it doesn't with others. You can tell me the intent for it being there but you won't be able to reason it making sense to just walk outside and gaze upon a spoon five times human size based on facts of reality. It's astonishing and that's what gets them involved. Thinking. Interacting. *OFC* is sized at 11. Measured at 11.5 inches x 4.1 inches x 4.7 inches, the shoe exhibits a complete red leather and fabric exterior. With my innovation, I place suggestions of white shapes and text alongside the outer and inner surface of the shoe. The stark contrast of the colors reduces the muddled look. It invokes legibility while attributing significance to the text/characters stenciled on. Showing in the inner face of the shoe are Chinese characters that are

a direct tie to the appropriated brand as it was their slogan. The direct translation ostentatiously reads as “Blowing fucking cowhide skin/cunt right now bitch” which has origins from past tales and laboring activity associated with raft building within Chinese culture. Sugarcoated for public media it translates to “we’re the fucking best” stemming from the inferred connotation of the cultural phrase. I expect the viewer to be confronted by this foreign language and recognize it as an easily picked lock with the help of Google translate containing additional context and humor. Located at the heel of the shoe and outer toe box area reads the initials of the brand at play. On the outer surface along the upper of the shoe exists a figure resembling Obama dressed in traditional KFC uniform. Deemed as the mascot for the brand, I expect the viewer to gravitate to the work through its absurdity and factual being; inevitably being engulfed in the surface level humor. From this distinct point, I infer the individually brought assumptions and conclusion will begin to make its rounds; Shaping the viewer’s experience to a subjective level. They’ll recognize the weight of the work and subconsciously add extra pounds. Embracing those negative or positive associations further succeeds in making the work successful. Showing three stripes on the uniform, the same display of branding is duplicated in the middle of the upper. There is a comical characteristic when analyzing the existence of these objects in our reality. Oldenburg stated how it’s the sheer scale that doesn’t hinder the public but the existing notion which is what becomes the obstacle. Expounding on that, It’s digesting the idea of it becoming a fact that becomes absurd. The absurdity attracts the audience; becomes the nucleus of laughter; and becomes the designated launch pad for the viewer to speculate the why of the work. In the sake of contrast, Oldenburg and I walk separate paths when it comes to the medium used, product shown, and its placement. The use of Champion shoe products shows an homage to a time period personally experienced and the same can potentially be concluded with Oldenburg

when looking at his *Mistos* (1992)[16] a.k.a “Matches” or his “*Typewriter Eraser Scale X*” (1999)[17], but the result is different outcomes. For me, Champion points to two points in time that’s came and left. The first has been stated about its level of presence between 2002 - 2012. A period involved with growing up witnessing Champion nothing more as a discount shoe found in Walmart, at best Payless which has since gone bankrupt. A brand not living up to its name. It says a lot once we travel back to the 90’s. Cultivating its presence and strengthening its reputation within the underground hip hop scene out of the 80’s, Champion would become the official supplier of the NBA from 1989 - 2001. Within this time frame, Champion would be the exclusive outfitter for the 1992 United States Olympic basketball team nicknamed “Dream Team”: Charles Barkley, Karl Malone, Magic Johnson, Patrick Erwing, Larry Bird, Chris Mullin, Scottie Pippen, John Stockton, Clyde Drexler, Christian Laettner, David Robinson, and Michael Jordan (“Dream Team”). Dominating the Olympics, the team has been described by the media, “the greatest sports team ever assembled”(“This Day in Sports”). Inducted in multiple halls of fame, Naismith Hall of Fame calls them, “the greatest collection of basketball talent on the planet”(“1992 United States Olympic Team”). I lay all this out to drive home the utter undisputed fact that Champion was Nike. It was at its peak, sitting on its throne. I now bring you back to the 2000s. The mighty fell. Who's to say it can't get back up. For Oldenburg a selection of objects he installed resembled a time before modern innovations. A sense of obscurity may hook some. For others it may be due to familiarity through nostalgic feelings. Placement while in public, is fixed, yet, in his defense, the scale makes it a tourist destination. My shoes are intended to reside among the public and filter through the crowd. Having it as a shoe provides more options for where my work lives and who it interacts with. I take great inspiration from Oldenburg’s “*The Store*” (1961)[13][14] by having the origin of its showcase as a pop-up store

installation within the art Mecca, New York. Circumventing, featuring and selling his work in the gallery scene, he put on his own showcase. In putting it together, he created business cards and posters centered around the store. Self promotion. Within this establishment, he featured assortments of different sized pastries/food and articles of clothing like shoes made out of paint plaster. Every item found within the store was available for purchase. He priced items from 21.00 USD to 1000.00 USD(“How much is that plaster in the window?”)(“Claes Oldenburg’s Store”). The nature of a pop up shop is temporary on average. Bound to no one street corner if one so chooses. Stealing from this concept, for me, this installation allows for the array of shoes to exist in multiple physical spaces where the changing viewers can observe, potentially taking them off the shelves.

With the exchange of monetary funds for the items of value on the shelves, we conclude the play of commodity and art while simultaneously leaving the limbo space between the two and move on to meet Jasper John down the way so we can carry on the conversation of pop art.

Influential in the significance of pop art, Jasper John merged painting and sculpture. Using found objects of everyday existence, he played with materiality in his work to challenge the viewer’s assumptions and value of importance attached to the signifiers and symbols. For Jasper John, it’s about pondering over why we place associations on images, numbers, and signs. His work curates visual engagement for us; drawing the viewer to take a closer look at what the eye is capturing and how the brain deconstructs puzzles. John begins by opening up the conversation to a wider crowd separate from the elite art critics. His readymade objects achieve this by garnering a familiarity with the work that the average art appreciator can connect with. Painted Bronze (1960)[18] represents this due to its bronze casting of what at the time were beer can silhouettes. The average man’s drink in the 50s. It sat on top of a shallow bronze pedestal.

Across the surface, positioned as labels are printed layers of oil paint marketing the item as Ale. The drink of the sophisticated in the 1950s (“Painted Bronze”). Tying it back to their own environment because his work like, Robert Rauschenberg, references real life. Moving along, there persists an array of materials and erratic placement of colorful layering of paint in his works. “*Field painting*” (1963-64)[19] acts as an example. Spermatic layering of color is used. Fixtures of home decor, cans, and letters bud out of the canvas. Collaged together, John strategies the composed composition to question visual representation. He does the same in “*By the Sea*”(1961)[20], asking why we see yellow, red, or blue the way we do. In terms of color and color patterns, I believe I do the same. It can be seen in the color scheme of the brands I showcase in my work. The arrangement of colors assorting with each other begs the viewer to question both why and how they associate meaning towards them. Why is it that when observing *Duffin Dagels X Champion*,[27] I can visually see the printed words “Duffin Dagels”, yet I inherently visualize it as Dunkin Donuts. The sequence of purple and orange results in the brain's first guess being Dunkin and not Duffin. Not the vice versa. Why is this the case and how did this come to be? Another example being *Pizza Hat X Champion* [31], the 4th install in my current series. Around the shoe are five black panels with a satin quality including the tongue. The Pizza Hat logo is placed at the front to the outer toe box region within one of these exterior sections. The toe box and back section are red. Both middle panels are painted to mimic the surface of pizza with its cheese,sauce, and toppings. The “C” logo is placed on the exterior panel. The midsoles similarly represent pizza except this time it's the pizza crust. Yellow is used all around but dominantly in the front toe box region and as the “C” logo. Tying the shoe together are the green luxury laces with gold aglets. The laces balance it out while complimenting the green leaf in the branding. In the red section towards the back following the sock liner, the

words, in white, “Iran with the Hat” acts as a created slogan with commercial value. It also is the clue to more context behind the shoe with clever wordplay. It’s a genuine spin off of the popular American chain Pizza Hut. The colorway of red, black, white, yellow, and green are represented but, why, in pairing with branding, our brains prematurely conclude it to resemble Pizza Hut and not Pizza Hat. Is it dictated by originality or environmental circumstances? Americans come to recognize Pizza Hut as an iconic pizza chain due to our choice of residency, but who is to say the same can’t be true with Iranians. As a result of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the end of Iran’s last monarchy took place and put a new Iranian dictator in position. Iran reverted back to an anti-western theocracy. American franchises were forcefully pulled from the foreign soil (“Iranian Revolution”). Pizza Hut included. After 26 years of pro-western influence, the franchises left their mark demanding the space to be filled. In came the knock-offs or alternatives (“How Bootleg Fast Food Conquered Iran”). A postoperative debut of Pizza Hut, Pizza Hat might hold as much significance for the Iranians. In theory this would mean the potential of authority the brand could be capable of holding could compete with the original. A power shift could potentially occur and what tactics would give way to such an event, collabs. Like Jasper John, my work acts as a transponder to be insightful of their thinking patterns. It becomes an internal interaction people illicit amongst themselves. It’s not a strive for change but it’s a hypothetical presented as a narrative worth pondering over.

Contemporary Context

Up to now my historical practice has followed suit to the Pop Art movement. It was a movement that all great art did; it changed the game. It expanded the scope of what could be considered. It didn't change or expand the realm at play. No. It merely turned on the lights so we, the invested audience, could understand what we were tripping over. Not taking it out of the shadow to see what it was but to carry on to our side of the room, setup with standing lamps and a jug on the brink of running out of water. Dehydration. Well, it had to be refilled but to do so required clearing up the path of travel. It meant seeing what needed to be sorted. It meant flipping that light switch. You start to observe everything and you're like, "what's all this". You get excited and think, "this might be fun", but you remember the necessity of water in order to continue your prosperous functioning capabilities. What supplied that was the faucet. One thing about the art world is that it has a Mecca of its own. A place where creative greatness is born or goes to be established. That place is New York and the contemporary Pop art scene benefited.

An obvious reference in my practice dealing with shoes is the contemporary artist Kaws. Where I transformed the Champion shoe with paint for media content, Kaws did the same with advertisements, posters, and billboards within the city of New York. For Kaws, his career began through his notice of similarities between graffiti and advertisements. He discovered how they reflected one another, so with interest he took the initiative to demonstrate this. How I incorporate graffiti philosophy in my work aligns with similar thinking patterns. Both Kaws and I embrace the commercial value of our medium choices for a more seamless invasion of the public's gaze. We seek the attention of wider audiences for a more successful dissemination of our work. As a graffiti artist, Kaws did this simply through tagging but was very successful when

he started to graffiti over bus stop posters and billboards, interjecting his art among the everyday hustle of the general public. I'm marking and laying paint on shoes but shoes are made with the purpose of traversing in them. Unlike posters, shoes are always on the move finding new places that gallery art won't. They are given a greater possibility of attracting attention and with every look to verbal remarks, I consider that involvement of the public. Killing two birds with one stone, it attributes more influence behind the authority signifiers we both display in our work while lessening the barrier for the common public's involvement in the conversation. In this case the conversation being the appreciation and understanding of the artwork. Pertaining to me, I rep the "C" associated with Champion. It also can be expressed through the colorways incorporated. Instances of figures in the series hold their own authority as signifiers. In regards to Kaws, these similarly took shape as the logos of appropriated brands and their slogans particular to their marketing. In some cases it were the formal signifiers or character features that resemble pop culture figures like the simpsons. All in Kaws' favor. Understanding companies' craving for attention, Kaws was free to customize their advertisements with his tag and illustrations. It was unauthorized. It was unwarranted, but he made it a part of his branding. Companies later discovered this unsanctioned partnership and instead of rejection, they integrated it. In similar regards, I create my own advertising, yet market it as genuine content. His work became a forced or unofficial collaboration with these authority holders. Through these collaborations Kaws combined graffiti and company ads together. In similar respects as Basquiat, the commercial world and art world would be joined together. In *Pizza Hat X Champion* [31], the viewer can witness a similar intention with the appropriation of the silhouette and theme. The fruits of this concept are embedded in the execution of the theme, which is turning a commerce item into high art with high demand designed to still be consumed by the everyday masses. The quality coupled

with the product's perception and reception further aids in its realization. With the sustainability and accessibility that comes with the usage of Champion shoes, the viewer can additionally recognize its easy access to regions within the public space. Work that only permeates gallery walls won't be able to spread its influence as far. I oppose this problem through the incorporation of the fashion world, specifically, shoe culture. "You can be sitting on a train and be in touch with a designer's work"("The Evolution of Kaws"), a statement by Kaws acknowledging a course of impact within both our work's purpose. In my work, I take advantage of the obsessive nature in collecting, especially for shoes. Collecting culture is what breeds notoriety and hype. It assimilates authority to brands while being the vehicle to the artworks dissemination. Kaws taps into this market through his designer toys. A set he first made was called the "*Companion*" series("The Evolution of Kaws")("Kaws's Companions"). You can chalk it up to the inner kid in people, but simply put, people just enjoy buying toys. Potentially seeing their favorite art piece take a portable three dimensional structure, just makes it worse. It's too ridiculous not to get. In my work, I become the middleman for Champion and spokesperson for these hypotheticals while Kaws cuts out the middleman with his website and personal store. With his toys and sculptural works, Kaws occupies the gallery space and public space, an aspect that came with the fascination in graffiti. We converge at this crossroad with the set up of our base of operations. Our stores become an exhibition amongst the people that don't close.

It would be in my best interest that the public audience could enter both locations and browse. They could then see the links that put us in an overarching category or chapter, but a chapter also has corresponding chapters within one book.

The use of fashion brands and food branding in my work aligns my work with artists who similarly highlight commercial goods. While we end up all having a say in consumer culture

within the playground of the present day, each of us chooses to address our stance on the topic at varying degrees. For my work, what I had to understand was its celebration essence. In my work, I'm expressing my new respect for both parties' synergy based on my research and observation through my artistic practice. Yes, I'm still making decisions on what to collaborate with, specifically with shoe culture and food brands/chains. Like the average, I choose the food before knowing its background. Its outward aesthetics were flippant and diverting, grounds for inspection. The background can make it better, attributing it with added value. It definitely amplifies the work, but it doesn't dispute the main point. I've taken the self-inflicted bet to create a commodity item of status and value like the major companies alike, but it's only to the avail of lifting the veil over people's eye. Enlightening the fact that the authoritative power these companies amass over consumer decisions were not destined, but cultivated over a period of time and strategic marketing that reflected the time. The point is that the intention of the work isn't to oppose the system at hand with a proposal of change. No. The essence around the work that propelled it to grow to such a point was the sheer respect and appreciation of the culture chosen and the consumer framework that efficiently runs it. I know the beauty of the work is the probability of leaving complexed. That it has within it the capability of presenting debates, statements, and/or critiques that elicit a response in people. I know the fact that it's not forced, but instead a food for thought for every avenue taken for each shoe shown, compliments the series. It constitutes the fact that shoe culture didn't manifest itself to a billion dollar market base with the ability of becoming symbols of wealth, class, and character through this desire for change or critique in the system at hand. No, people had an interest in rocking various unique pairs and wanted to share that among their peers. What it really shows is the untapped potential of the shoe game that the art society hasn't truly decided to explore. I just gave these art patrons

the tools to do the dirty work and a glimpse of what It can be. It's in their right to take the offer or not. It stems down to this. There is more to it so why don't you go up and take a look. It's not a pushed critique and with the reference of Chloe Wise's work, this is confirmed. In Wise's exhibition "*False Beaches and Butter Money*" ("Chloe Wise: Of False Beaches and Butter Money"), she mixes up the medium and media: Art installations using readymades and varying materials; oil paintings made to represent media; and video format media with sound and skits. All with the underlying trend of milk due to its associations and comical inferences. Focusing on her large scale canvases, she paints both portraiture of groups of people or of the individual. They're done In oil and exhibit close to naturalistic rendering quality. I can assume, separate of her talent, that real people make up the advertisements she points out so why not make them look like real people. It pushes forward the narrative and stabilizes the simulacrum. In some of her paintings she includes brandings of both fashion figures and food products. She involves both consumer bases in her work for the opportunity to make statements at consumer culture. She questions human's willing involvement in these companies' shenanigans with such blissful ignorance. Who is spoon filling me with information? What is this well packaged information and are any aspects of the delivery system trustworthy? Through these internal questions, Wise finally challenges the nature of humans to choose the moral path. Her work in turn becomes a critique against the signifier or branding that dictates consumer choice and what intrinsically gives them the authority to command such influence. In *Glutton Freedom* [22], Wise paints a woman looking to the side and down, our left, with a stern facial expression. She's dressed in a white one piece set dress with folds. It expresses class while the open section revealing her chest and stomach says sexy. Measured at 72 inches x 60 inches, the work is oil on canvas. The palette is cool. Composed in the center, she models her outfit while holding food products and

resources. Tucked into her arms is a half gallon carton of Lactaid milk. Standing in a peaceful landscape of lush grass and clear blue sky with calming clouds, Wise seeks to bring attention to each marketing tactic used to manipulate consumer choices. It expresses both the more targeted sex and the craving of sexual desire as a valued tool. A clearer hint of sexual lust is the vegetable position at the lower abdomen. It's then all packaged together under the pretense of purity. From the connotations of milk to the setting of the background, purity is at the forefront of the marketing focus. For most of her work, a common trend used are milk related products.

Champion is mine. With Champion's recent trajectory, the brand's connotation and status is in a state of change. It is on its redemption arch after falling by the 2000s post Chapter 11 bankruptcy and split of headquarters. How far it goes, I don't know, but it's better than being stuck in Walmart/discount stores. Using it as my dependent variable, I commandeer the essence of its potential growth to create a series of hypothetical products to be released parallel to their rise in status. Under the veil of official certification, I promote them to aid in my quest to create a commodity item. I showcase the strategies used by making advertisements and directing sneaker media content. The collaboration with food brands, who in their own right subvert their official counterparts since they are alternatives, becomes a disruption to the bigger shoe brands' monopoly. Wise challenges us to question why they have authority while I just decide to demonstrate it.

Where she seeks change, I seek inclusion. The same inclusion as a Jeff Koons which is having the audience who typically don't have the required knowledge that's deemed a "requisite" of being an artist. The showing's intent is to give them a bigger investment in the conversation. There is such a notion of creativity and willingness to appreciate that creativity, that exists outside the usual artist hangouts. The ones that can't create either teach, inspire, or appreciate.

I've found no difference between the passion of an art critic towards a painting than a shoe fanatic towards a new released colorway of Jordans, let alone a custom. There seems to be a disconnect between these two sets of people only due class when it's generally known that, at a more frequent rate, genuine creativity comes from below. From the bottom and travels to the top. As a model for such convictions, I acknowledge my reference made to Jeff Koons as he steps in as my next contemporary influence.

He preaches inclusiveness. He always wanted to be included in the art world. He had that passion to be amongst artists and their conversation over the events and topics that coexisted with every new artwork added. Koons was thrilled for this but discovered he didn't speak the dialect to properly intertwine with such crowds. He would go to college and learn this requirement but this labor would inspire his work after. Koons would decide to make work that acted against this barrier and later the barriers humans put between each other, which stops them from connecting with others. Koons in his early works utilized ready made objects of banal quality. Like Duchamp, he too was testing the qualifications of what was considered art. This being implied, I believe his main focus was to leave as much room as possible for the general public to get involved and engaged in the work made. These readymade items were items every man used or knew of meaning every man had a place to start with since it was relatable. Including them in the artist talks are the source of his material choice, enticing public interaction. Koons' vacuum readymades were an early sign of this. Skipping to the periods of his sculptural works, I believe this focus only expands further. By time he produces his reflective surfaces, his goal has expanded to invoke acceptance. "*Hanging Heart*" (1994 - 2006)[23]. It starts from the reflection and what you see. Others, maybe, but it's supposed to be you. The work functions as so. Acceptance of one's character based on the associations brought to the work. It becomes an

automatic introspection of how you think and the conclusion you come to. You treat it like a personality test with every thought and association that comes to mind. What feeds it. Does it have a stake in my past or my biological nature? Is it justified or is it just passing by like tumbleweed in the wind. Once you realize an influence of his is Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, the picture might clear up, because Freud expanded onto what was known as talk therapy. It was vocalizing those fears, impulses, and insecurities to place where in your timeline or biology they lay. Koon wants the viewer to have this same exercise but within your mind. Take as much time needed, but, eventually, you must receive and accept it. Whatever result or conclusion you get to inform you, the viewer, about you, accept it. Accept all the mistakes, pain, and evil, along with the good. Once you do that, you transcend to a higher wavelength, because judgment no longer rules your mind and actions. You're free. You become the embodiment of perfection. Step three is being aware of this change. You must be aware in order to share it, because viewer number two is looking at the same thing and, in theory, going through the same process, so they will need a partner to play catch with. It's the realization that we, humans, are perfect, for in that self awareness, we can find common ground between each person; we can speak a universal language. To an extent, I attempt to follow the same theory. I have no intention of insinuating to the viewers of my work that they are perfect through acceptance of themselves as a whole. No, the acceptance I desire is a wider, more diverse audience to have the ability to see and involve themselves with my work. Through the accessibility nature of the shoe, I plan to have a strong stake in the commercial realm to allow more people to be included in the art scene. Establishing the pop up store as the setting and following the concept of a traveling museum or wearable art piece, I seek to attract more eyes and have a more direct interaction amongst the general public rather than appeasing a subset of artists. Greeting them would be monitors

showing ads and commercials. Posters in stores of concepts and/or posed models will hug the walls. Both elements are designed around the contents of the shoes on display. Ideally whatever size and location is chosen it aids in the overall attraction of people to walk in to see art yet maneuvering it like a regular sneaker shop on the block.

Both Koons and I embrace the different classes and economic levels in society and treat it as a non-existent barrier in regards to the appreciation and understanding of our work. I choose to accomplish this in the form of a Champion brand shoe while Koons uses exaggerated scaled objects that mimic ordinary items. In fact, my next contemporary artist, Tom Sachs, similarly does the same but in a slightly different rendition, but first I too had to complete an introspection. Not for transcendence, but to understand this artist and why we are analogous.

Remembering how I crossed paths with the creative act of combining paint and the artistic talent to the structure of a shoe has caused a deeper examination into my reason for doing so. Sachs' relationship with the replica models he manufactures and the reasons for his art career reflect in my work. It reflects in the work not at face value but in the metaphysical. One of the first few pairs I ever made was followed through out of the want to imitate. It was a response to an already made custom shoe. Not having the funds to shop for multiple name brand items like Nike and Jordan, it revealed an alternative to how one could change the perception of one's public image and status with less perceived clothing articles. My biggest worry on my body at the time was the swag on my feet. Why, because there was no swag. For the most part it was Champion and Airwalks. After that moment, I was looking at these no names; these Payless shoes differently. Its value could be elevated. It looked cool but it prompted me to ask, I have an artistic talent, why can't I make it myself? So I did. It took a close patron to have a Jordan on deck to customize. It was a Jordan 12 Chicago Bulls Retro that I customized in the Supreme

aesthetic. Supreme was the thing, so conjuring a Supreme product through individual manufacturing was crucial. I consolidated my time on this shoe adding the Supreme text, an attempted red fade for it, and a black strip on the side of the toe box. Famously known, Sachs did the same with a Nikon digital camera in 1977[24]. The camera was made out of clay and is believed to be proportional in size. Included colors are red, yellow, and black. Black being dominant. While it had no functionality as his later works, he applied the same philosophy to this project and the rest of his following work. He would later phrase it as, “better to make it than to own it”. This would additionally apply to the non-existent. It became a better compromise and, for him, caused the material aspect of the product to matter less (“The Talks”). For Sachs, pouring time and labor into what he would recreate gave those false replicas much more. It’s what gives them their authenticity and would in return imitate a higher quality of emotional attachment compared to having just bought it. Sympathetic magic was the term he used. It led to the creation of what he classified as “genuine fakes” (“How to Succeed as Artist”). Fakes, because of their obvious resemblance of the original, yet genuine due to the committed labor self inflicted to produce a piece that can closely resemble the original, especially to the level of successful functionality. I consider *Duffin Dageles X Champion* [27], as a comparable outcome like these genuine fakes. They would become my instruments in my hypothetical narrative. Looking at Sachs’ *Nutsy’s McDonald’s (2001)*[25] in comparison to my *Duffin Dageles X Champion* [27], similar topics become visible. In his life-sized model of a McDonald’s boutique, a grill, fryer, stove, fridge, monitor, and condiments are ready to be used. McDonald’s branding is placed at the top and the bottom of the model. The classic colorway is identical. Speakers are located on top of the roofing made and a window for clear communication is considered. To immerse in the environment, employee outfits are hung out to the side. Both our work address accessibility,

consumerism, branding, and commercial products as high art. Both our work have an operational function meaning my shoes are capable of wearing. Sachs' McDonald's grill, fryer and condiment dispenser actually work with uniforms to create the environment of being an employee. We share the idea of food as the theme and insist on making the corresponding logos and colors visibly known in the work. Accessibility is exemplified through the usage of materials. Sachs uses wood and other industrial options. I use tape, paint, and leather. In some cases synthetic fiber. Differing approaches but similar outcomes. They both can easily assimilate with the DIY category. A category that prioritizes accessibility in materials. DIY is the building block for what I do. DIY, It's the attire for the punk movement and the expression for skate culture, which featured the first instance of custom shoes. Anyone can go and do it, so it's not special. What's special is the time taken to achieve the better quality of outcome. Sachs uses magic and I use alternative food. As a direct tie to human nature to consume the depiction of food brands become a double entendre, which is integral to the work along with the appropriate formal qualities. With it, I demonstrate the fetish associated with collecting and consuming as a deciding factor in an artwork's performance both commercially and as high art. We both create sculptures that garner devotion in their own respective subcultures and we use these sculptures to ask the question of what makes a commercial object high art. Not a critique but to ask what is considered valuable. Where we separated from each other resides in the process of making. Sachs purposefully lets his hand show in the work. Through the visible presentation of all the imperfections that went into building his works, Sachs let the audience know that this was individually crafted by him and not a machine. This belief acts as a contradiction to the reproducibility of the objects he creates. I defy this belief by attempting to mask my hand as the workings of an industrial machine. With *Pizza Hat X Champion* [31], I attempt to transmit this message through the seamless quality of

the hand painted theme. Doing so, for me, enacts the illusion of it being an official Champion produced shoe. How the shoe feels and looks worn is thought about to help mask aspects that may break the illusion. Becoming the marketing team myself I keep up the same act. One thing I hope not to mask is the ability of it being bought not to be displayed in a glass case but to be adorned on the body like an ornament; a piece of regalia. Certain shoes like designers, customs, or classics are promised with the effect of providing the wearer a shift in self esteem and confidence. You begin to move differently. Your pride is up because you and everyone else can visibly notice and recognize the value attached to your body. Push the reason as to why aside and focus on that feeling that came from a switch in personality. I believe my work embraces this observation and I know it's capable of invoking such an emotional response.

This last contemporary artist has called attention to this same phenomenon in her work. In light of the rest, I see a more one to one comparison between our work. Tiff Massey is her name and her work, in my opinion, is the best visual representation of my work in its ideal. When it comes down to displaying the basic function of my work, Tiff Massey's wearable adornments achieve that the best. Belonging to her 2011 collection "*Power*" [26] is a piece that measures 48" x 16" x 8". It's made using powder coated steel and wool. The piece is an over exaggerated neck chain. The wool acts as the chain's links while the steel structure is the pendant. Hung from the neck the "chain" carries the weight of the material and the value given by onlookers and admirers. The sheer size embarks on the wearer how it must be worn to appropriately reflect the significance it exudes. Once adorned, you must, in full stride, walk with confidence. No doubt about it. Its value gets shared with the rest on the street and in turn they invest more significance in the piece. From comments to curious questioning, they all involve themselves with the work. A core objective intended for both connoisseur and observer to

receive and value in my work is its capabilities of being equipped to the body. It can be worn and further expressed. Through its wearability can it further grab attention and access to crowds, stations, and burrows. My shoes are a crowd seeker in their own right and must be exemplified as such in the most interactive way possible. I drive this point to the audience with the worn condition of the Duffin Dagels. Justifying its condition is its fixture on my feet and all the wear and tear it has accumulated through periods of usage. It becomes both a statement and an anchor to ground the viewer to its given commercial purpose. Massey in works like *"They Wanna Sing My Song But They Don't Wanna Live It"* (2011) (Post Navigation"), shows understanding of this incentive. Her work is greatly influenced by african regalia and is realized through the aesthetics of the jewelry and fashion pieces. Her curiosity provokes the combination of the regalia of Africa and 80s Hip Hop ostentatiousness.

Both our work promote a relationship with the body; with the self, but she wants the viewer and herself to be aware of the regalia's effect. The effect is the change in character. Massey expounds on this point expressing how more air is breathed into one self. It's the realization of a new found set of confidence and pride. The mission of her work is to entail the designated audience to get in touch with themselves.

Now, differences in our themes may distract from the similarities. Massey's work does have a more firm stance on race and class being major themes in her work in comparison to my own. The sneaker culture has the black community to thank for its wild success so race comes with the work no matter what. It's embraced. I don't want it separated. The dominating force of the culture is still black, so the question can always be asked if the black community gets the credit they deserve for leading creative fashion styles and contemporary fads. It can, but I'm personally not asking that question. It has grown past just the one community's appreciation. I reference this

moment in my work and I choose to accentuate class or status as a more prominent theme. Massey has also claimed her intended audience is black, specifically, black women in her exhibition *Proud Lady* (“When Detroiters Are Feeling Themselves”). Mine is for all.

Influencers, Influences + Sources

The journey to conjuring together this body of work from an afterthought conclusion to a physical display of materialistic products, became a possibility due to my desire to have a taste test of a segment of shoe culture, customizing. This hidden community came across my sight lines one day and our paths from then on have intersected, tightly merged till present day. It happened as simply as, “That’s dope, I can do that and I can do it better”. Motivated to beat the other skilled participants, I sat at the dinner table impatiently waiting to digest the nutrients gained from the similar content scoured from. An honorable mention in my efforts to progress would be Seriato, a fellow participant. Working out of Sacramento, he produced works of art for jaws to be dropped once seen worn in public. Known for his space galaxy style, he currently has close ties to sports, frequently creating items for professional athletes. I consider him as one of the best, but one must start from somewhere. It’s Dillion Dejesus who gave me the tips and advice needed to invest in my technique and skill. While the community was my school of learning, Dejesus was the main source of teaching and content to feast on. My focus here led to the adoption of his mindset when it came to work quality and public appearance. While Roy Lichtenstein predates this influence, my wants to apply a factory quality originated here. Lichtenstein instigated it further. Dejesus found his passion during his Highschool years which he would turn into a career through the rise of social media. Like many others in the field, Dejesus wanted his shoe game to stand out from the rest while receiving feedback that acknowledged his success. Seeing how that feedback is now found in comment sections online, opened my eyes to recognize the varying media content being made on one subject. Just being present in this space made me see how mainstream events or popular culture subjects had an

effect on what would be artistically made. A segment of what Dejesus does are YouTube custom reviews and observing these shared glimpses of what was previously stated. Eventually, formulating the concept of my body of work would arise and I owe Shme Customs credit in deciding on what avenue I should take or if needed, carved out to create a personal walkway. Shme Customs, a.k.a Kelsey Amy, graduated from Penn State with the intention of becoming a hyper realistic painter. What she found after graduating was the thirst to apply her cultivated talent customizing shoes by popular demand. Her presence in the community exists and stays consistent with today, but I look to her series of Monarch customs for inspiration. The notorious monarch shoe a.k.a the classic or signature dad shoe meant for high top white socks and light blue jeans. Shme took this banal silhouette and revitalized it. She created a niche for herself in customizing a shoe no one thought to customize. With her talent, she gave it designer quality. Once the public became aware it grew traction and now it's a part of her identity as a shoe artist. Coming across this manner of her work fueled me to do the same. To stand separate from the others and add another element of uniqueness to the game. The shoe space has been inviting creativity making finding a niche harder to identify, but Shme provided me with half of the equation for achieving this. Her work dictated the purpose of doing a background search in most of the recognizable shoe companies established today; what shoe would be my main silhouette. It changed from silhouette to a consistent brand and later the research expanded to understanding the trends that each company shared. As part of my research, a name would reveal itself as influential in sneaker culture going public, Tinker Hatfield, a name Nike's founders even consider their saving grace. I include Hatfield not for his reputation in shoe culture but the light he shined on me to think of using food as the shoes' theme. Hatfield worked with Nike as their Lead Shoe designer. He would go on to invent and innovate new shoe designs. He is responsible

and loved for partnering with Michael Jordan to create the Jordan shoe lines from one to sixteen. In the Jordan XX's, Hatfield sat down with Jordan listening to his life story for hours. He translated it on the shoe by using symbolism to reference each part of his life. Fixating on this information, I began wanting the subject to say more than just what I put down. In some form, more layers of meaning were intended to ideally be present, yet its compatibility with collaborations was a must. Food came to mind due to seeing different companies doing collaborations with other brands like artists but more relating to fashion. Food theme was also present with the shoe space, but, to be different, I concluded on the alternatives. Curious on how nothing has been done with alternative food brands, I saw them as an opportunity to optimize. Embedded with humor, double entendre, and associations, a surreal experience was underway. An experience that would be at full effect only with the appropriate setting. The setting was the first thought in the brainstorming stage, flushing itself out along the months leading up to the showing. The idea was finalized for construction after the intervention of Dave Ortiz. Dave Ortiz, graffiti writer and owner of Dave's Quality Meats, a Skate/streetwear shop that was set up in New York. What ties him to shoes would be his collab with Nike to make the "Bacon" Air Max 90s. This food inspired work was a bonus find but the main takeaway was his mindset that went around creating the first concept store in NY at the time; his words. DQM was a skate shop that was dressed up to appear as a butcher shop, which stemmed from a bet made with a friend. He went in wanting to disrupt the space. He felt how serious NY was at the time and decided to counter it with an air of fun, uniqueness, and weirdness. I adopted, yet adjusted this countermove to my series's benefit. Finding more examples of this store setup, I would begin to tweak it to my usage. In the end, I pivoted in the direction of a pop up store as it more aligned with the added associates I have entertained. With such a setting, it gave my shoes support and an environment

they can seamlessly interact with. Taking a step back, I must recognize my appreciation of the committed sneaker heads that reside within the sneaker community. Post involvement, I can see that they bring much value to the community. They carry the culture on their backs and, in doing this project, I took great inspiration from that. One of my influences is Dj Clark. I take from Dj Clark his mindset and philosophy that surrounds the interactions with shoes. Working with shoes himself during his multiple Nike shoe collabs, he took this thought process with him in the design stages. He didn't come from the standpoint of an artist hoping to display their work on a wall in a gallery. The shoe equivalent would be in a glass shoe case for display. He took the perspective as a being that looked at shoes as an instrument to be worn. He gazed upon them as a vehicle to drive a story or message while having the potential to function as art that's as valuable as the ones within the gallery space. He is a sneakerhead and an avid collector. His perspective is invested in this project and is a big component in having one of the works in a worn state. He makes shoes for consumers so they can consume and I follow suit. My last influence is Salehe Bembury. A 37 year old resident of the sneaker culture and contributor to the billion dollar business. He is an American shoe designer who wears the faction brand Versace with honor. Diversified in numerous brand collabs and silhouette innovations, Bembury has provided fresh air in the space for profitable ventilation. Because of this, his creative designs, he has attracted various press including being the recipient of the 2020 Footwear Designer of the Year. With innovative creativity, Bembury is known for catering his designs towards the high fashion market. Inspired by popular culture and his growing love for hiking, he chooses to exhibit qualities in his works indicative of these source material. His work exudes organic and nature with sprinkles of celebrity culture. He has worked with Nike, Yeezy, Vans, and New Balance. His notability regarding his innovations on the NB silhouettes are the reasons for his placement here.

Aside from Champion, NB were the other most noted to have risen in value in recent years. I see Bembury as one of the factors in awarding NB with its recent influx of hype. For this reason, I inflate our similarities and consider his contribution to the NB name equivalent to what I've set out to do with Champion. I adorn the title customizer and him as a designer, but we're achieving the same result. He's done influential work and as you keep reading, the proof to my previous statement shall be declared for review.

Conclusion - BFA Work

In the future as my artistry as a visual artist develops further, I do expect to continue to stay consistent in customizing shoes with the intention of mastery. I do speculate that progressing along with the same theme will be acted on. Beyond the ten pairs of shoes made in completion of this body of work, there still exists more brands of the same category that are sitting reluctantly on the shelves in the shadows and tucked away in the memories of the select few. No one else intends to give those brands a public platform to share existences with the hungry new audience. For some, it's a returning cameo appearance. An honorable mention. They get to recognize the audience they once served while gaining credibility. A discovery of thought over history and aspects of reality came about due to the research element. Due to that, I believe it would be an interesting niche to flush out some more. As time runs by, obtaining more eyes on my releases is expected with hopes of a materialistic building to actually showcase these shoes and products. If this building were to come to fruition, the idea of eventually turning it into a hype beast store has been intriguing. It would be the next step in the completion of this body of work's evolution. Now, no matter which occurs first, I aspire to improve my skills in customizing to the point where I can broaden my range to deconstructing and reconstructing the shoe or building one from scratch like JBF customs and The Shoe Surgeon as examples. A full redesign. I think it would be a great skill test while satisfying the curiosity of what the act of doing such a thing would add to the original idea. Being there for such an event would be a benefit for continued support while following along with my endeavors.

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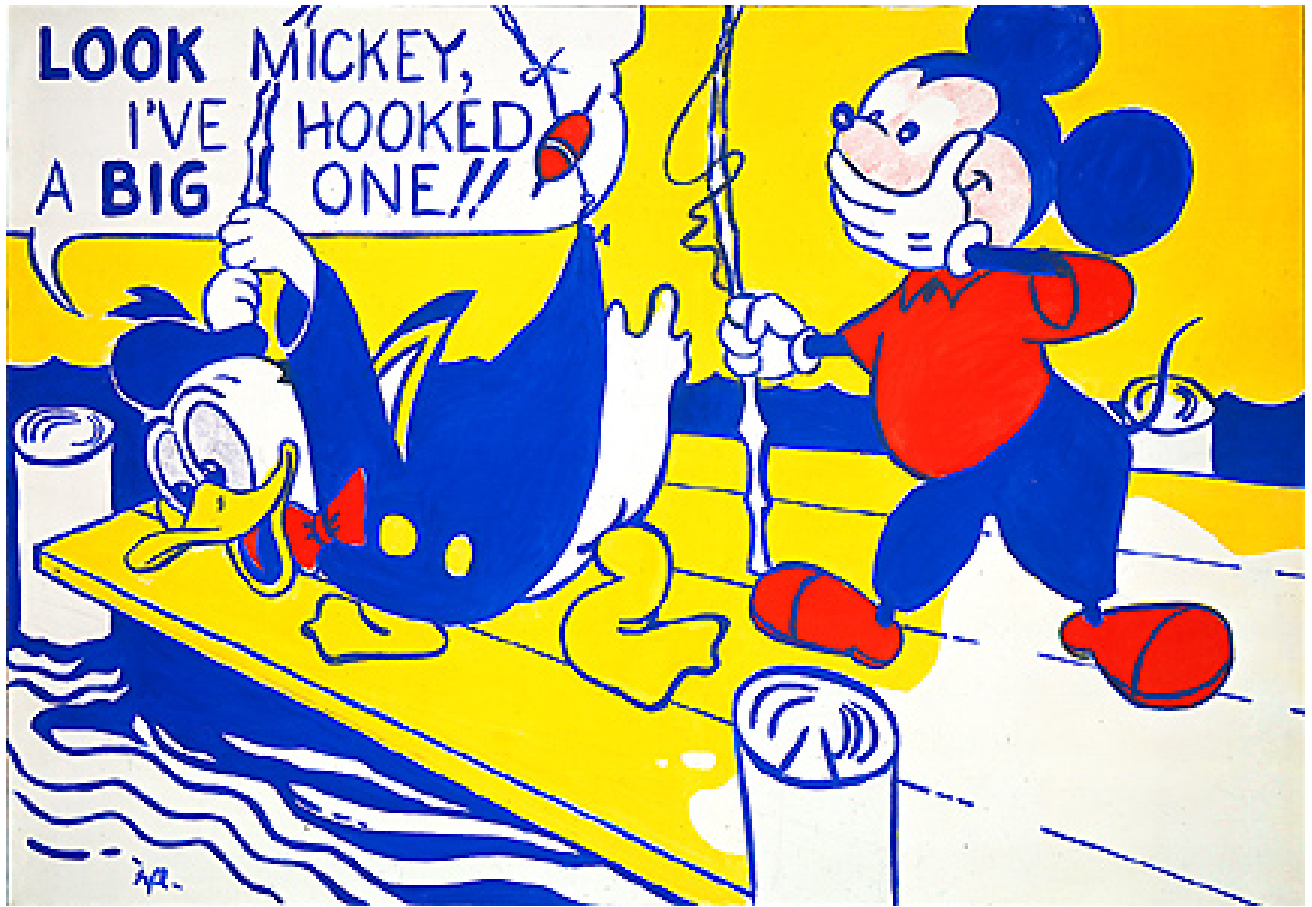


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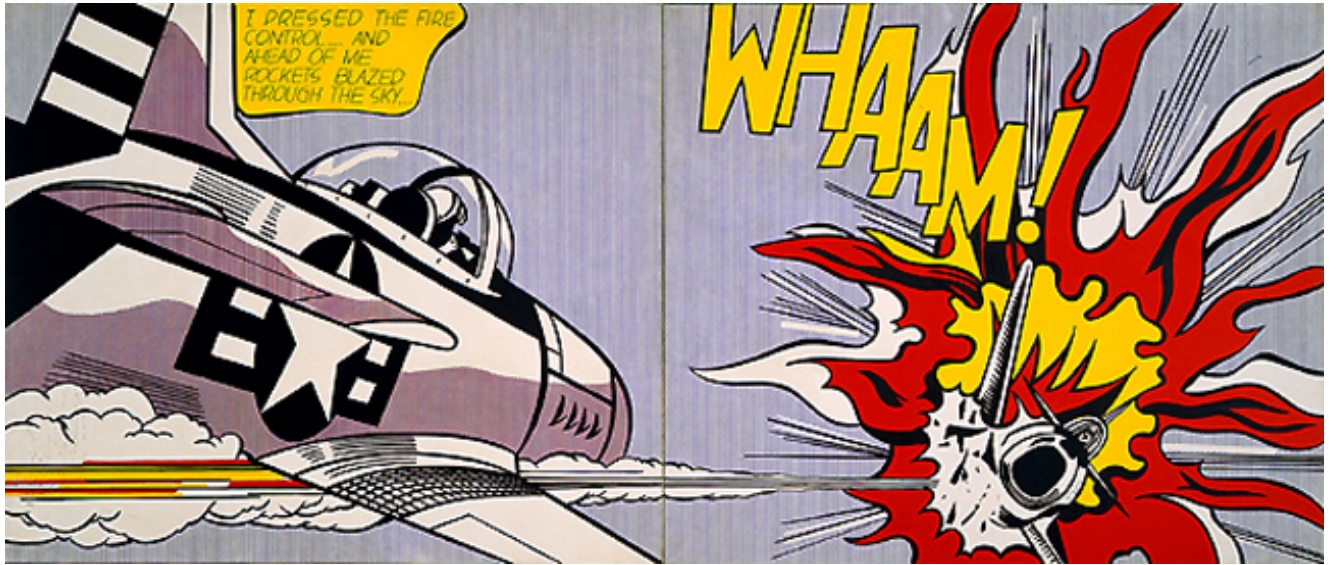


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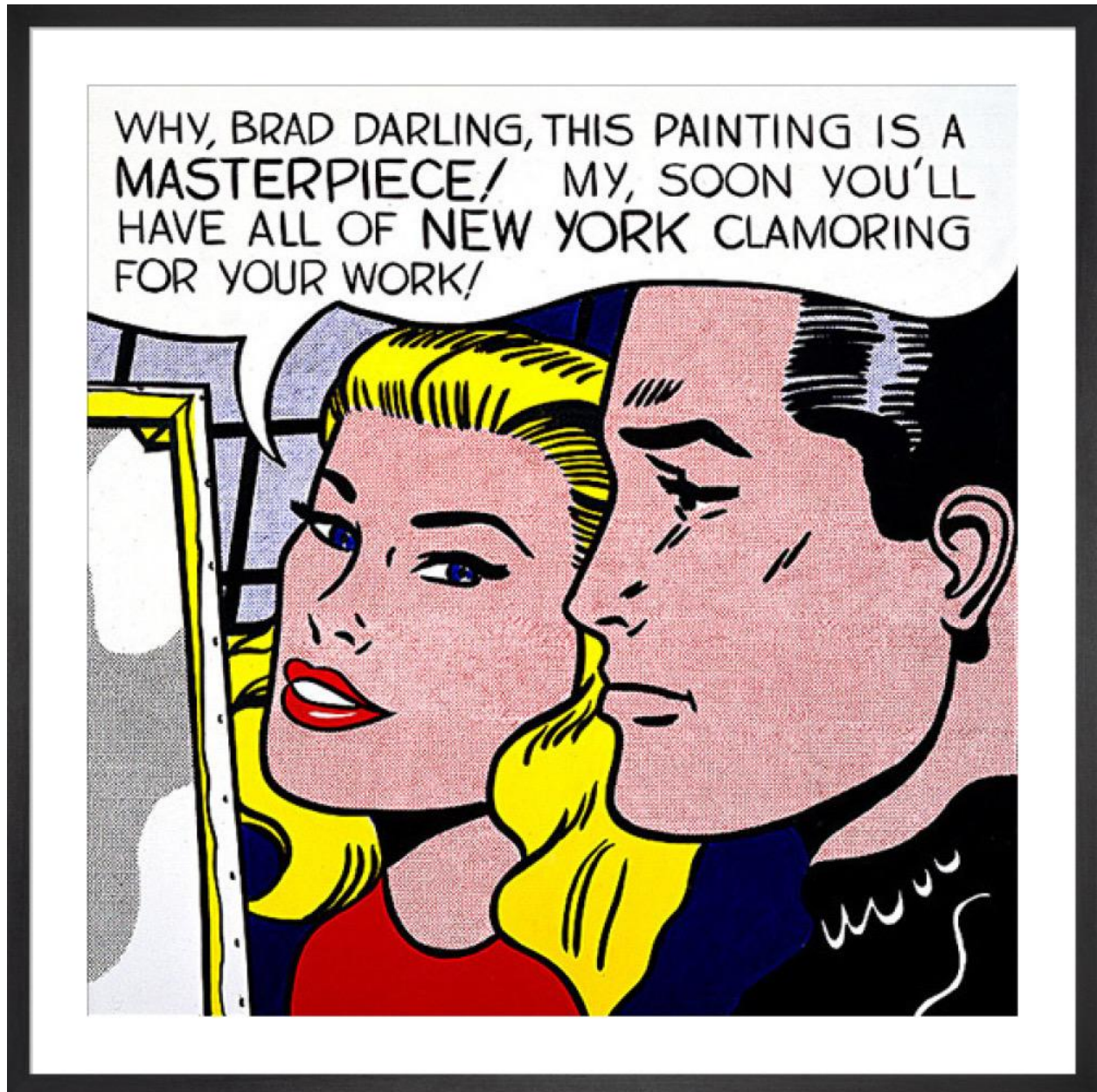


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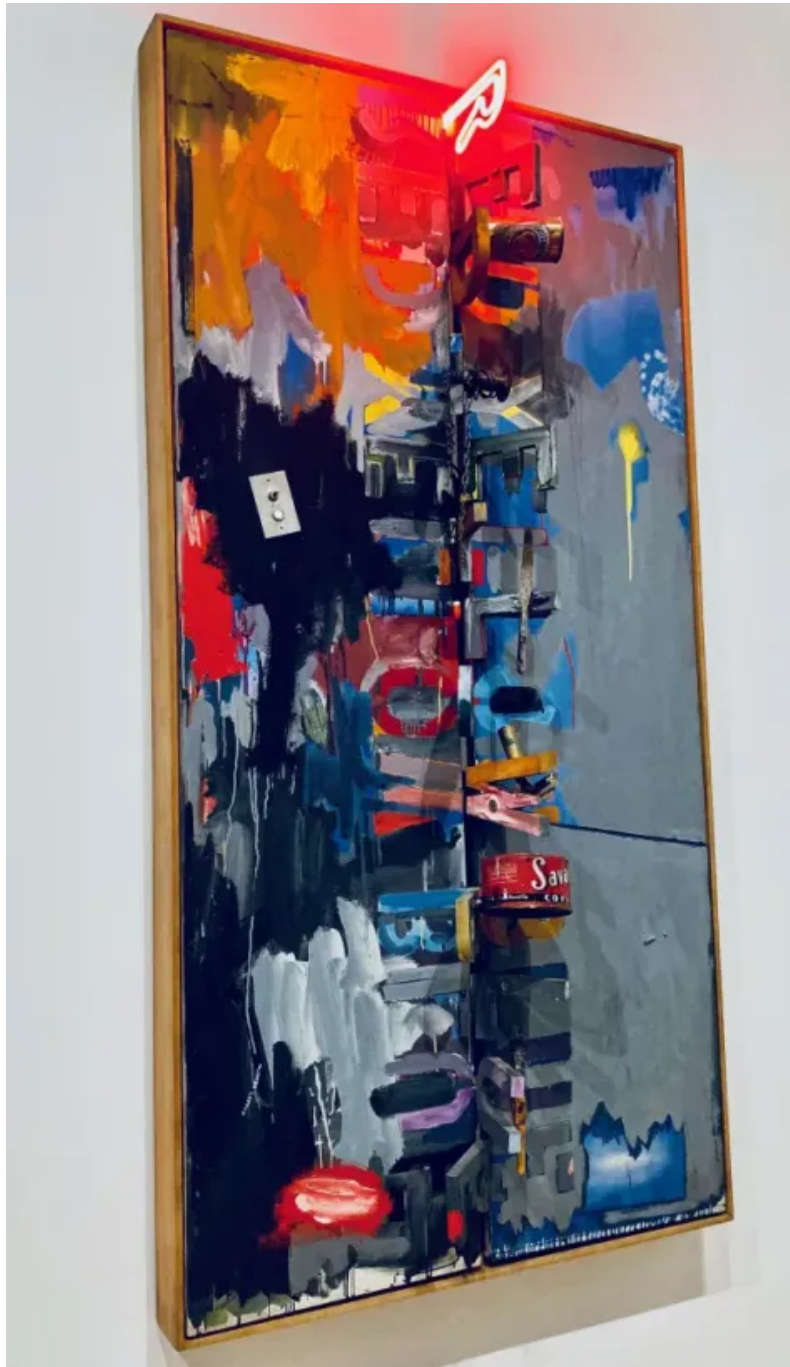


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Illustration 28, Adrian Holt, *Hydrox X Champion*, 2023



Illustration 29, Adrian Holt, *Snipers X Champion*, 2023



Illustration 30, Adrian Holt, *Obama Fried Chicken X Champion*, 2023



Illustration 31, Adrian Holt, *Pizza Hat X Champion*, 2023