

Fleeced

An Exhibition Statement Submitted

by Jason Gress to

**The Department of Art and Art History
as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
at The University of Saskatchewan**

March 25th 2005

Copyright Jason Gress 2005

Contents

- 1.....Acknowledgements
- 1.1.....Introduction
- 1.2..... Personal History
- 1.3.....Situating the Process and Materials
- 1.4.....On the Title

Descriptions of Individual Works

- 2.....*Ronald Frieze*
- 2.1.....*Wonderwall*
- 2.2.....*You May Need Me Tomorrow*
- 2.3.....*The Next Big Thing*
- 2.4.....*Vs. The Claw*

- 3.....Conclusion

-Endnotes

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Department of Art and Art History for seeing value in my research, commitment to teaching, and the pursuit of this degree. Their constant financial support and the opportunity to grow and thrive as an artist and teacher will be remembered always. I want to acknowledge the personal commitment and guidance of several individuals who served on my committee at one time or another: Charles Ringness, Tim Nowlin, Graham Fowler, and my supervisors Peter Purdue and Susan Shantz. I wish to thank my fellow MFA students as well, especially Chai Duncan and Stacia Verigin for being such good friends. You have all been a huge part of my experience here in the program.

Lastly, and most dearly, I thank my wife Roxanne for the countless sacrifices you have made to ensure my success. You moved across the country for me ... I owe you immensely, more than I can ever repay. I could not have accomplished half of what I have without your loving support.

"An artist is someone who produces things that people don't need to have but that he - for some reason - thinks it would be a good idea to give them."

Andy Warhol

1.1 Introduction

I am interested in finding links between consumption and the creative process. Consumption of goods is only possible as a result of the creative process that lies behind the products marketed to us in a Capitalist Society. *Fleeced* refers to the actual materials used in the show as well as the ability of Consumer Culture to dupe consumers into just about anything. We are coaxed into believing that by exercising choice in our daily purchases, that we are somehow engaging in a creative process where we control the selections. The works in *Fleeced* owe their sensibility in part to two main art movements: Pop Art of the nineteen sixties and Commodity Criticism Art of the nineteen eighties.

This statement serves as background reference that will ground my MFA Thesis Show. I will relate my own work to the above art movements and delineate the ways in which my research is an extension of these prior concerns.

Due to the commodified nature of the objects I make, and the milieu in which I situate them, I have included some notes on the relationship of consumption and commodity to art, fast food, and the retail sector. In his essay *Making Up People: Consumption as a Symbolic Vocabulary for the Construction of Identity*, Richard Elliot describes the current conditions affecting people in our Consumer Society, which provide the backdrop for my concerns in *Fleeced*:

The development of individual self identity is inseparable from the parallel development of collective social identity ... self-identity must be validated through

social interaction and the self is embedded in social practices. Endeavors to create the consumer's self-identity often involve the consumption of products, services, and media; and there is always tension between the meanings we construct for ourselves and those we are exposed to socially ... this dialectic tension requires active negotiation of meaning.¹

1.2 Personal History

The best place to begin discussion of *Fleeced* is to start with a brief personal history. This is necessary as a grounding of the subject matter, materials, methodology, and sensibilities used to execute *Fleeced*. Since my arrival here at the University of Saskatchewan, my research has revolved around issues of consumerism, commodity fetishism, and kitsch. My interest in these areas of research stems from a need to understand the world around me in relation to my origins. I have used a unique methodology of sourcing ideas, materials, and production strategies for my art practice by visiting and observing the "Retail Landscape."

I was born in 1969, a time when consumer goods started to reduce in quality due to the increased proliferation of plastics. Instead of over-engineering things as they had previously done, designers began designing with planned obsolescence in mind. This means that every few years products should wear out, break, or simply go out of style. The use of plastic made things cheap enough that if they broke, customers would just buy another one. This ties into the theme of *Fleeced*: we are being deceived by the notion we must constantly replace and upgrade everything ... keeping the Capitalist Machine going. This notion of insatiability is described in Grant McCracken's book *Culture and Consumption New Approaches to the Symbolic*

Character of Consumer Goods and Activities:

Consumer goods are a way of perpetually renewing our consumer expectations. The dark side of this aspect of consumption is that it helps to enlarge our consumer appetites so that we can never reach a "sufficiency" of goods and declare "I have enough" This aspect of consumption also helps illuminate some of the irrational, fantastic, escapist attachments we have to consumer goods.²

I am interested in responding to the ways in which I was socialized in my childhood, as well as examining the behaviors I inherited from my family of origin. Because I work quite intuitively in my art practice, I have the tendency to revert to a subconscious matrix that is part my past experience and part my present experience. Thrown into this mix are things like cartoons, fast food, and children's toys. These elements are visible in my work yet often escape recognizability.

I am the son of a carpenter, and from a very young age I was interested in assembling things. I would follow my father around work-sites and pick up scraps of wood and nail them together. He would often ask "Why don't you build something you can use?" I guess even then I was interested in making things that were just for looking. I was fascinated by forms and how materials related to each other.

I come from a self-professed line of Bargain Hunters. Situated smack in the middle of the working class, my family were Carpenters, Train Engineers, Farmers, Homemakers and General Laborers. All had a good strong prairie work ethic and the ability to spot a bargain. One

side of the family in particular seemed to only buy things that were on sale. Growing up in suburbia also afforded me the "luxury" of accessing all those products and foods designed for the lowest common denominator, such as McDonald's and Wal-Mart. I have incorporated some of these elements into *Fleeced* by using materials I found readily accessible in Wal-Mart and Dollar Stores, subjecting them to rigorous use of both skill and repetitive manual labour.

My first job was in fast food at McDonald's. Working there, I was exposed to a systematized way of producing food, which seems to be a thread in my current art practice. After McDonald's, I began repetitive work as a pizza-maker ... basically the same process as for hamburgers, working on an assembly line for food. I began to make links between the notion of my labour, its potential efficiency, and the work I was doing. Within these fast food systems, I excelled at becoming efficient in the construction of large numbers of "food objects." I found myself daydreaming about what it would be like to see all of the hamburgers or pizzas I had made in a year in a pile in front of me.

1.3 Situating the Process and Materials

I visit stores like Wal-Mart, McDonald's, Dollar Stores, and discount outlets to access the way in which a specific kind of consumer aesthetic is both developed and applied. This particular collection of retail objects in its most inexpensive form (the clearance bin) takes on a particular air of desperation, as products prepare to become worthless as they are reduced further and further. These types of retail outlets are created to entice middleclass North America into consuming what is in effect a world of plastic.

This sourcing becomes increasingly important in my work; I feel I need to be entrenched in these environments in order to see firsthand how people (customers) react to products, displays, and retail environmental conditions like lighting and product placement. In some ways, I see the art world as an extension of these commodity systems; it is not immune to the same set of constructions designed to value one object over another.

This way of working also shares an affinity with Pop Art and Commodity Criticism Art. In the case of Pop Art, Andy Warhol, a graphic designer turned artist, had a very innate sense of what people would buy both in the world of advertising and art. He used his own unique visual approach in his ads and art, but his subject matter was the commodities that surrounded him in daily life.³ These ranged from soup cans and Brillo boxes to commodities of another kind, celebrities.

While Warhol used images of these commodities directly, I employ a strategy that gleans from retail objects and displays instead of recapitulating them. I am still employing a Pop strategy by using readily available and inexpensive materials to create emblematic versions of consumer goods. My objects utilize the same formal principals that Pop Artists like Warhol did: bright primary colours, repetition, geometry, and stylized presentation. Further links can be found between Pop Art and my work because they both owe their existence to the visual vocabulary proliferated in a culture obsessed with materialism, consumerism, and packaging.⁴

There is also another sort of "familial" relationship between my work and Warhol's, at the specific chronological juncture where his

work begins to address not only images of Consumer Culture, but objects as well. Warhol's 1964 *Brillo Box* was a hand painted copy of a regular Brillo box, one used to package cleaning pads.

Warhol asserted that his creation of this new version of the box counted as art.⁵ In a similar way, I take lowly utilitarian materials like cleaning sponges and pot scrubbers and transform them into art objects. I make no attempts to hide the identity of the original materials; I simply assert that my manipulation of these inconsequential materials makes them art.

For example, in my series of sponge works, I simply began with an attraction to the bright colors of the sponges. I selected them for this reason but quickly realized that there was something more interesting about this material than I originally expected.... It has an innate ability to be compressed. Through exploration, and without premeditation, I simply selected another material that also comes from bargain stores: hair elastics. These proved the perfect material to accentuate the compressibility of the sponges.

A simple experiment one afternoon turned into eight months of research. If I had set out to create a given project, I would not have been able to discover this material's unique qualities along the way. I prefer this mode of inquiry because it allows for uncalculated outcomes, happy accidents if you will. After I make basic selections, like materials or thematic choices, I allow the process of making to take over, letting the characteristics of the materials play a role in how I will make decisions for the duration of the process.

The consumer society envisioned and sampled by Pop Artists like Warhol saw a landscape of "earthly delights," a much more optimistic

outlook than artists involved in the later movement of Commodity Criticism in the nineteen eighties.⁶ These artists saw a consumer society that, according to Leonor Heartney in her book *Postmodernism*, was a much bleaker place:

*The commodity critics, by contrast [to Warhol] were mired in a technological dystopia in which people only sustain the illusion of individuality and choice by cultivating their relationship to mass-produced objects.*⁷

In *Fleeced*, I have picked up where nineteen eighties Commodity Critics left off by highlighting the marketing of consumer choice and consumption as a perceived creative act. I use the formal strategies employed by product designers and advertisers, such as colour, shape, and scale, to access an impulse from the viewer. I want the viewer to be enticed by my objects, to the point where they may even consider stealing one. I am extending the concerns of the Commodity Critics in the sense that I have created systematized ways of making multiple objects efficiently, forming a kind of mini-factory.

This systematization of art production undermines the traditional notion of art making as an activity that is concerned with creating discreet individual objects capable of emitting a certain *Aura*. This notion precedes what Walter Benjamin calls "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin asserts that the advent of technologies like photography contribute to the loss of the *Aura* of an art object or image because they are inherently reproducible. Benjamin denotes a reproduction of an art work as lacking a unique existence in time and space.⁸ I am subverting this notion by producing multiple discreet objects that appear to be copies but are all equally original. Further, because I have made each one by hand,

without the intervention of any tools that facilitate reproduction like molds or mechanization, these objects still possess the ability to resonate as individual works of art.

Commodity Criticism artist Allan McCollum created a series of multiple works in 1983 called *Plaster Surrogates*: plaster casts of picture frames in a large quantity. He painted each to look like they had a black painting in them. They were a kind of object *Tromp Loei*, imitating the format of paintings. They lacked canvas, but were signed, dated, and placed in salon style on the wall. McCollum asserted they were art, even though they were missing the most obvious piece of this traditional arrangement, the paintings themselves.⁹ He reportedly sold a large number of these pieces. Later works by McCollum, such as *Fifty Perfect Vehicles*, 1985-9, explored the notion of slight difference in mass produced objects. In this work, McCollum created fifty large ginger jars:

McCollum saw continuous marginal variation of a single unit of production as reflecting the nature of the market in late capitalism, creating an illusion of choice where none really exists. Within computer-aided mass production, minor variations to the production-line norm are easily introduced without varying the basic design.¹⁰

McCollum's concern for difference and commodity translate into an organization of objects that initially appear to be identical, but upon closer inspection of the items, small differences become amplified in relation to each other. This notion is juxtaposed with the notion that for all intents and purpose, the objects appear as identical everyday

objects. By placing these works in a gallery, McCollum forces the viewer to relate to them in a way and at a pace that is appropriate for an art gallery. I use this gesture in the execution of *Fleeced*. The use of the white gallery space accentuates the bright vibrant colours of the synthetic materials I have chosen, and calls attention to their beauty despite their utilitarian nature. At the forefront of McCollum's work is the premise that the artist's gesture is a factor that helps determine whether things are art or commodity.

In *Fleeced*, I have created the scenario where all the products of my labour are in front of me at once (not hamburgers or pizzas). I have made over 13,000 unique hand-made sponge sculptures and presented them together. I produced these little objects by repeating cutting and binding gestures over and over, in essence, duplicating the same methodology I used in my very first job. I see many similarities between the way I feel when I make the sponge pieces and the way I felt when I made fast food. There is a sort of meditative space that occurs as you become proficient in the process. Large blocks of time pass and I often forget how long I have been sitting and working.

This routinization of work is a strategy used by employers to ensure that an acceptable product can be made by semi-skilled or unskilled workers.¹¹ By undertaking a repetitive mode of object making, I submitted myself to a process that would inherently lead to efficiency, increased skill, and shorter production times. This methodology contradicts traditional art making processes that are slow, laborious, and often require weeks or months to make a single sculpture. With elements of *Fleeced*, monumentality and scale are reached not with large objects, but with the accumulation of small

objects that together represent large amounts of labour and time. In fact, there are enough sponge bundles in *The Next Big Thing* for each bundle to represent one of the approximately 13,000 hours I have been in the MFA program.

I told myself when I began Art School almost seven years ago, that I would apply the work ethic I had learned earlier in life, as well as in my fast food experience, to my art making. This makes the labour I put into my work very important to me. I will not allow my work to be made by anyone else. I feel it is important for me to master the techniques necessary to execute the work. I enjoy the challenge of applying rigor and technical skills to inconsequential, mass produced materials. These objects occupy a place between art and commodity, existing as both at the same time. With *Fleeced*, I am leading the viewer into the territory where impulse compels them to have a desire for objects whose only purpose is to satisfy the impulse they create: they have no real use but to be consumed for consumption's sake alone.

1.4 ... On the Title

The title *Fleeced* refers to the act of fleecing; some of the objects in the show are literally covered with synthetic polar fleece. This use of synthetic fleece is a bit of a red herring, since it is the first and most obvious reading of the show's title. However, I am most interested in the underlying concept of consumerism as it relates to how commodity fetishism and Consumer Culture within a Capitalist System "fleece" the public into believing they have a genuine need where one does not exist. Consumers are deceived at a very basic level, which causes them to desire a myriad of things above and

beyond food, shelter, and clothing.

Descriptions of Individual Works

1.5 Ronald Frieze

This portion of the show is comprised of eighty lineal feet of chair rail, spanning two walls of the gallery. This piece uses readymade objects in the form of McDonald's cookies. The cookies are recessed into four inch wide strips of mdf board, forming what looks like both a chair rail and an architectural or sculptural frieze. This piece was constructed using a systematized and repetitive mode of cutting out each cookie recession by hand with the aid of a small router. I created an assembly line-type production table, similar to the concept I learned working at McDonald's twenty years ago. Robin Leidner discusses the McDonald's philosophy and work systems in her book *Fast food, Fast Talk - Service Work And The Routinization Of Everyday life*:

No one ever walks into McDonald's and asks, "So what's good today?" except satirically. The heart of McDonald's success is its uniformity and predictability. Not only is the food supposed to taste the same every day everywhere in the world, but McDonald's promises that every meal be served quickly, courteously, and with a smile.¹²

The rhythmic repetition of the five different cookie characters, Ronald McDonald, Birdie, Hamburgler, Grimace, and the Fry Guys, is interrupted only by the disconcerting rings of oil that have leached into the surface of the wood. These stains form a sort of misshapen halo around the head of each individual cookie/character. The stains are a result of the large amount of oil that "naturally" occurs in the cookies. I think of this combination of materials as being separated by one chemical element. The mdf contains many chemicals, including formaldehyde, and the cookies contain a long list of chemicals. The accompanying label lists the ingredients of the two materials, drawing no distinction as to which ingredients belong to which material.

These ingredients all seem interchangeable and blatantly synthetic in nature. The chair rail is hung at the height of a child aged five to seven years. This is the target age for these "oil-filled delights." These cookies also serve to reinforce the company's hallmark character, Ronald McDonald, and other characters uniquely associated with McDonald's. The overall feeling from the piece is one of humour, attraction, and repulsion. The visceral and sensory quality of the oil stains, as well as the height of the frieze, ask the viewer to ponder the value of these icons/snacks to their targeted audience.

This piece has a relationship to the work of American Artist Tom Friedman, who uses unconventional and readily available materials to produce labour intensive, somewhat fantastical creations that cause the viewer to wonder "how did he do that." He has used bubble gum, paper, toothpicks, and his own hair in his work; he has also carved a self portrait from a single aspirin.¹³ Friedman uses subtle humor in his work; I share Friedman's subtle sense of humour, letting the materials and my gestures do the comedic work, as opposed to

spelling it all out for the viewer.

Ronald Frieze has an ancillary relationship to the concept of *Fleeced*. This piece functions as a sampling of the McDonald's aesthetic and branding recontextualised in a gallery setting. The fact that the McDonald's cookies are recessed into chemically based mdf draws a material connection in terms of colour and texture. The combining of these two materials allows for the revelation of just how much grease there is in these small cookies.

1.6 Wonderwall

This piece consists of three panels of wood, each three feet by four feet, which are covered with synthetic fleece material. This material appears as a fur-like skin over the panel, which is the aspect ratio and size of a large painting. The surface of the panel is topographical in that it sticks out in varying degrees of relief from the surface. It could be likened to an aerial view of a landscape. The surface of each panel absorbs some of the light, causing no reflection from the soft, purely colored surface.

This surface, combined with the gentle hills and valleys of the implied topography, asks the viewer to physically touch and interact with the pieces. The underlying system used to create the topographies is a collection of bagged loaves of Wonderbread™, compressed to varying degrees. These loaves are obviously in a state of decay, as they are transitory in nature at best. The bread seems an unlikely material to use as filler for these topographies, until you realize it has no intrinsic value of its own.

Wondewall takes its title from the hit song by the once popular, then ravenously hated British pop band Oasis. This band was very popular in the Nineties, but fell out of fashion because they lacked substance, and had huge egos. *Wonderwall* is a reference to the song, as well as the bread, both examples of popular yet empty cultural fillers. I am also interested in the fact that the transitory nature of these bread topographies undermines their value as works of art. These pieces are unstable due to the slow decay of their underlying structures. Although these topographies seem taut and appealing, they may continue their instability to a point where the fleece may sag and their aesthetic appeal may fade.

This piece has an aesthetic relationship to a series of prints by Canadian Artist Tom Dean. He did a series of images of brightly coloured text displaying each of the Ten Commandments. The text overlaid on a background of polka dots, similar to the dots on a Wonderbread™ bag. This use of kitsch imagery in the form of a food package/logo adds an element of wry humour to the work ... a strong message delivered with a contradictory backdrop. The recognizability of the Wonderbread dots raises them to the status of icon. I have used this same approach in executing *Wonderwall*, relying both aesthetically and conceptually on the cache that Wonderbread™ and its packaging have as being "as American as apple pie." I go a step further than Dean by actually using the bread itself as part of the work. I have also employed the trademark polka dots on the surface of the work as a means of letting the viewer access the hidden loaves of Wonderbread™.

The Wonderbread™ relates to the McDonald's cookies in that they

both occupy a strange place in the world, not quite food, not quite materials; they are vacuous in a way, but icons nonetheless. The bright polka dotted packaging reminds me of childhood, as well as the psychology of colour used to attract kids and parents into buying a nutritionally void food. These same polka dots are used on the surface of *Wonderwall*, to mimic the packaging of the bread hidden within.

1.7 You May Need Me Tomorrow

This piece is comprised of 51 individual mini-sculptures, which are made from sponges and plastic scrub pads. These objects can be seen as prototypes of a sort for products, gadgets, and things not yet in existence. They are well-crafted, and seem like Boy Scout craft projects executed by M.I.T. Engineers. In fact, the actual need for these things does not yet exist, they offer *potentiality*. The latent use for these objects is not yet accessible, but their cuteness, and multiple reference points, entice the viewer to want them. I am interested in impulse as it relates to the psychology of selling goods. Retailers are in tune with the power of impulse, as a way to move objects off the shelf. There are similarities between the gallery experience and the shopping experience even if the consumption that occurs in a gallery space ends is a visual one.

1.8 Vs. The Claw

This piece is a sort of companion piece to the pieces *You May Need Me Tomorrow* and *The Next Big Thing*, which offers accessibility to the same types of "prototypical" objects, with added element of actually making them available for purchase in the gallery in real time. The method for this Capitalist exchange is facilitated by the game-like

vending machine known popularly as "The Claw." This commercial game-machine was designed originally to give customers the opportunity to play a game of chance in the hopes of winning a small prize, such as a key chain or stuffed animal.

The Machine is a readymade brought into the gallery to be displayed as part of an art work in the fashion of Commodity Critic Haim Steinbach. Steinbach was concerned with the shelves and display systems on which we chose to display objects. He often chose odd assortments of objects like pots, alarm clocks and lava lamps, which were related to each other either formally through colour or conceptually through other means. Almost all the elements Steinbach uses have an element of kitsch associated to them.¹⁴ In this manner, The Claw also has a kitsch quality; normally it can be found in arcades or carnivals. The machine functions as an accessory to rest of the show, as well as a container for displaying the sponge objects it contains. Because this machine facilitates an economic transaction, it serves as a bridge between all other objects in the gallery and the viewer. In this case, the glass chamber of The Claw is filled with sponge objects of my own design.

The act of completing a retail exchange within the gallery offers an allusion to the currency of Art. The gallery space is meant to elevate, rarify, and value objects. The presentation of these items on shelves in the beginning portion of the piece *Vs. The Claw*, sets a certain value for the pieces; they rely on the economy of cheap material turned precious. As the viewer rounds the corner to see The Claw portion of the piece, this valuation gets confused in the carnivalesque aesthetic of the vending machine. There is a contradiction within *Vs. The Claw*, as there is in all the works in *Fleeced*: inexpensive

materials turned art via the artist's hand, then again devalued by making them into multiples, for sale or to "win" from a carnivalesque vending machine. This piece gives the viewer the opportunity to act on their impulse of attraction to the brightly coloured graphic forms that surround them in the gallery.

1.9 The Next Big Thing

This piece consists of over 13,000 hand-made mini sculptures, fashioned from sponges, pot scrubbers, and elastics. Each bundle fits easily into the palm of your hand. By increasing the quantity of these objects, they take on a monumental presence of their own. The objects rise and spill over the edges of a crate covered with synthetic fleece. This presentation is stylized, in the sense that the form of the crate is normally an object designed to provide a functional transport and storage space for other objects. The crate also makes reference to Andy Warhol's *Brillo boxes* in terms of its simulation of a real shipping box. Further, the crate references the proportion of Warhol's *Brillo boxes*, but in this case, the viewer is confronted by art objects other than the crate or Brillo Box itself, in the form of the bundles made from cleaning sponges and pot scrubbers. These materials convey a subtle and humorous reference to *Brillo boxes*, because they are the modern day version of the cleaning pads contained inside Brillo boxes. In a 1964 article, *The ArtWorld*, Arthur Danto paraphrases a contemporary critic writing about Warhol's boxes:

If one may make the facsimile of a human being out of bronze, why not the facsimile of a Brillo carton out of plywood? the cost of these boxes happens to be

2000 times that of their homely counterpart in real life a differential hardly ascribable to their advantage in durability. In fact the Brillo people might, at some slight increase in cost, make their boxes out of plywood without these becoming artworks, and Warhol might make his out of cardboard without their ceasing to be art.¹⁵

This valuation, or re-valuation of objects based on their ability to exist as art works instead of simple utilitarian objects in the real world, reminds me of a phenomenon that is essential for the function of this kind of an art economy. For someone to place high value on the artistic gesture and actually be able to act this valuation out in a transaction to purchase objects of art such as Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, there needs to be a certain level of affluence. This affluence often manifests as *Conspicuous Consumption*, a phrase coined by Thorstein Veblen. This consumption is described by Roger S. Mason in his book *Conspicuous Consumption A Study of Exceptional Consumer Behavior:*

Each consumer good is seen to offer a bundle of utilities which is compared with those of competing commodities by potential buyers and which directly decides the level of demand generated for the product in question. Whilst this interpretation of product value and consumer behavior gives a general explanation of the buying process it says little or nothing about the nature of 'utilities' being sought by consumers in making their purchase decisions.¹⁶

It is this stage of the consumer transaction I am most concerned with because this seems to be the moment when impulse comes into play. Once a consumer has put themselves in the vicinity of purchasable product, the value and desirability of that product can be shifted rapidly by the way it is packaged, displayed, and made

accessible. With *The Next Big Thing*, I am asserting that this space can be created in a gallery setting, demanding a similar valuation and impulse from the viewer.

This piece utilizes the crate as both plinth and sculptural element. Crates are usually utilitarian and not precious in themselves. In this case, the fleece covering creates a skin over the crate form, giving it a sort of precious and tactile surface. The small sponge objects spilling out of the crate read as a kind of stylized packing foam. Because I encounter so many brands and trademarks in my sourcing, I feel it is necessary to create this kind of signature object of my own. I view the small bundles of sponge and scrubbers as a signature, or logo, unique to me.

This initial impression is confused by the fact that the contents of the crate (the sponge bundles) and the crate itself end up competing for aesthetic supremacy. This competition goes on as each element resonates alternately due to their vibrant colouring and tactility. The crate also has reference to the art world, in that it is the usual mode of storage and delivery of precious art works. The form of the sponge objects is referential to many forms in the "object world," but the viewer can't quite pin down what the object is. Part sprout or seedling, a small gift, a child's toy, an alien pod ... all interpretations are valid. Overall the form seeks to be one that is alluring, but ambiguous, and a kind of trademark or brand of my own.

The process behind the piece involved systematizing a production mode that is very similar to fast food models. I worked on them in shifts, literally until my back ached. The labour required for each of these objects, as well as their presence and allusion to a great

amount of work and hours, is a kind of antithesis to their colourful, playful appearance. The labour is all my own and was often done at my home, in front of the television. This consumptive-creative dichotomy is one that interests me because, at first glance, consumption and creation seem removed from each other.

Fleeced represents the amalgamation of an art practice, a personal history, a view of the Retail Landscape, and an exploration into the power of impulse to shape our consumptive habits. The show is not meant to simply mimic Consumer Culture, but rather to draw attention to the systems operating to entice us into both commodity fetishism of products and aesthetic valuation of art objects.

¹ Richard Elliot, Making Up People: Consumption as a Symbolic Vocabulary for the Construction of Identity from Elusive Consumption Karin M. Ekstrom and Helene Brembeck, (New York: Berg Press, 2004) 129.

² Grant McCracken, Culture And Consumption New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities (USA: Indiana University Press, 1988) 104.

³ Jacob Baal-Teshuva, ed., Andy Warhol 1928-1987 (New York: te Neues Publishing, 1993) 9.

⁴ Teshuva 9.

⁵ Eleanor Heartney, Postmodernism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 41-42.

⁶ Heartney, 42.

⁷ Heartney, 42.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction, from Art and Interpretation, Eric Dayton ed., (Canada: Broadview Press, 1998) 416.

⁹ Heartney, 43-44.

¹⁰ Andrew Causey, Sculpture Since 1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 248.

¹¹ Robin Leidner, Fast Food, Fast Talk-Service Work and The Routinization of Everyday Life (Berkeley USA: University of California Press, 1993) 24.

¹² Leidner, 45.

¹³ <http://www.designboom.com/portrait/friedman.html>

¹⁴ Heartney, 47.

¹⁵ Arthur Danto, The Artworld, from Pop Art A Critical History Steven Henry Madoff ed., (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 1997) 275.

¹⁶ Roger S. Mason, Conspicuous Consumption A Study of Exceptional Consumer Behavior (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) ix.