Stencils of the Influencer

    Something that has become an integral part of culture today is social media; its how we keep in touch with friends and loved ones, how you express yourself for the world to see, and also how you brand yourself for the professional world, and in order to make money. Social media is just one of the things which millennial do that prior generations don't understand or appreciate. Yet this generational divide has been the same for every other young generation of the past, the culture of the youth going against the grain of the pre-established culture of their elders. My project aims to comment the popularity of this new generation of counter-culture creators, while linking them to the art and culture movements of the past. Through examining these influencers through a pop-art lens, I will try to link Andy Warhol's idea of mechanization to the constant stream of similar selfies posted daily by people online.

    As an artists, I have always been extremely influenced by pop-art, especially by the works of Keith haring and Andy Warhol. In their heyday, these two queer men, through their strange stylings and ideas, rock the zeitgeist North America and European through images, popularizing ideas of sexuality and freedom in a climate where they weren't always respected or even represented. Warhol remarked on the state of advertising and culture, and the immediacy of things, even back then. His work is an example of using ones influence for a cause in order to further a movement or specific goal. Influenced by many of the portrait works of Andy Warhol, I want to link the idea of the social media influencer selfie to the mechanized portraits created by Warhol in the 70's and 80's.

    There are many sides to the world of social media, and there is an idea that the millennial generation knows it better than anyone else - all of the ins-and-outs. But among these millions of millennia, there exists a very small and seemingly insignificant group of people, known as "Influencers". Originating on Instagram, the social media influencer is a content creator with sponsorships and post-promotions, known as "monetizations", attached to different posts. Most people aged twelve to twenty-two, most okelly follow atlas one form or social influencer, who through the ads tells them how to dress, what to buy, and where from. And despite the fact that they have little-to-

no apparent talent or skill, they seem to have become one of the most culturally relevant forms of entertainment today.

The piece that I am proposing is influenced both by my own personal experiences with influencers and social media, while being influenced by the beliefs and ideas of Andy Warhol and other pop-artists. The first time I attempted this work was in my final year of high school, as a thesis piece. I took the faces of my favourite stars and created stencils, superimposing their coloured portrait onto another coloured background. By using these recognizable faces, taken from pictures that they took themselves, I attempted to comment on the repetition of idealized beauty in social media, as well as the way that we idolize these figures as more than just people, immortalized in art. I further drove the message of repetition and mechanization doing it in a pop-art style, creating and re-creating the same faces using different colour combinations. This ties back into the idea of the influencer, and how young people today have a false sense of themselves and beauty because of these images. In an article by Paige Smith, writer for Medium magazine, the impacts of social media on both girls and boys were studied. The struggles with body image that girls go through has been highlighted in society for a while, even before the advent of social media. Female beauty standards today are seen almost everywhere you look; from the Kardashians to Instagram models. But male beauty standards are also equally perpetuated, although in a slightly less obvious way. With popularity of Marvel movies, boys have begun to think they need to look like the leading men in those movies, which is not even remotely normal. Within the LGBT community, these issues are prevalent as well, with the "Insta-gays" branding themselves as perfect bodies, and little else. The toxicity of social media culture is almost palatable, yet as a young person I am unable to break its hold over me, as are most people my age.

For the redux, "Stencils of the Influencer" would continue to be influenced by pop art and Instagram culture, and also use the same ideas and techniques of my past project, but limit the variables slightly. Last time around there were too many colour combinations, and certain elements weren't finished properly, and have aged badly. This time around, I would create a different process for creating the stencils themselves, as before they were not very re-usable; constructed of layers of paper and masking tape. I

will most likely create stencils out of acetate or foam/illustration board, as both will hold their form better, and will hopefully stand the test of time. I also would somewhat limit the colour palette, using mainly primary and secondary colours - red, blue, yellow, green, orange. By cycling their order by one every time, I will attempt to limit overlap and contrasting colours, and create visual and spatial interest. I love social media, and I see many of the benefits it has to offer, especially as an artist and a member of the younger generation. I love beauty culture form fashion to fitness, and the consensual glorification and commodification of the body in order to reclaim oneself is a form of expression that I love to see online. But on the flip-side of "bearing it all" online, I also am able to see the toxicity of it and the way it creates unhealthy standards of body image and beauty. I don't want to subvert this idea of perfection in the portraits, but make it unattainable in its perfection - creating simplified portraits of the Instagram influencers I chose to drive a point home. We don't have to look like these god-like personalities, their lifestyles aren't attainable for the average person, and that is okay.

   By acknowledging the fact that these Instagram models and influencers are paid to look and act a certain way, we are able to become more accepting of our average-person body. By mechanizing the images of these "perfect people", I'm trying to show the fact that thee people are more of a product of their circumstances, and their looks. Not everyone can look like them, and that's ok. They're a brand, a product, with many people working under them to ensure the fact they alway look photo ready when they post. This is the other downside pf social media, is the fact that the person represented the screen doesn't always correlate with the persona on the other side of the screen.Taking Andy Warhol's idea of mechanization, I will try to recreate a simplified representations of these perfect people.

   In my life, social media has always been a source of stress, but also inspiration. My thesis in grade twelve was somewhat in the same lane as this time around, yet i approached it with much less planning, as well as the underdeveloped skills of a 17-year-old. It a piece that i still have in my bedroom at home, and is one that is very close to my heart. By choosing more relevant and inspiring influencers and personalities, I am going to try and rework the initial concept.

Overall, I am very excited to redo this piece. It has great sentimental value to me, as it was the main piece for my application to OCAD, and grade twelve thesis. Since grade twelve then however, I have grown both as a man and as an artist, and am hopeful and interested in recreating the charm of the original while still creating the new version in with the ideas and values I have in mind, which I chose to highlight in this proposal.

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