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# CUT

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**CUT**

**BY**  
**Bryan Drew**

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Aaron Holz

Lincoln, NE

April 2010

CUT

Bryan Drew, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2010

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Advisor: Aaron Holz

The act of cutting is to sever, to divide an object or even an idea into separate parts of its original state. Non-tangibles can also in a sense be 'cut', like gaps in memories or modifications of beliefs or ideas. My work encompasses these definitions of cutting. Working mostly from photos, I use imagery from personal experience, such as meat from my hunting experience, patterns from nostalgic blankets, or photos of people in my life. Other times, I choose imagery simply because I feel compelled to paint it, or it feels somehow needed within the composition. My process begins by painting one flat color ground, and is often the color in my memory when reflecting on the experience of the chosen photograph. I then choose what aspects of the photo to render, leaving spaces where the colored ground shows through. By taking objects and figures out of their normal context and placing them on a flat monochrome field, I have removed the excess influences of the original context. It then becomes less of a 'scene'

and more a transitional place between physical reality and a nonsensical dream-like world of mind and memory.

Intrigued by the way people respond to visual information in their surroundings, I strive to remove such noise, being selective in the objects I choose. These remaining empty spaces affect the perception of the story or narrative. Empty space can invoke different reactions for each individual. Some experience calm, others curiosity, and still others discomfort when confronted with empty space. There is a tendency or perhaps need for the mind to fill in these gaps of empty space, to conclude, to make sense of its environment. My paintings remove what we find stable and consistent in our perceptions of our surroundings. My paintings subtract, and the viewer is left to piece together what has been lost.

My work often deals with the human form. I have a personal connection with the people I paint, though I only show portions of them, often just their clothing, sometimes an arm or two. The act of removing or retaining visual keys, such as hands and faces is a process of cutting the identity of the subject. In light of devastating circumstances in my personal relationships, I'm inclined to read into these figures more than I otherwise would, as being evasive, mysterious, and ultimately unknowable. Patterns have also emerged in my work. There's a comfort in pattern, in such things as wallpaper and blankets. Pattern

also serves to flatten, to reinforce the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. Pattern can hide and camouflage. It also can be thought of more abstractly referring to habits in relationships.

Meat also has been a theme within my work. I'm intrigued by the idea of life being sustained through death. I am an avid hunter, and have butchered and processed my own meat before. I've also gone to slaughterhouse to see and photograph first hand, the transition from animal to meat, neatly wrapped in plastic ready to sell. This natural vs. artificial aspect emerges in my work, even with the use of packing peanuts, this non-biodegradable, annoying, wasteful packing-product whose namesake and design is influenced by a food.

While this selectivity gives me freedom to explore chromatics and composition, I have a fascination as to my deeper motivations behind my imagery choices. My work is autobiographical, but not in a logical sense. Perhaps similar to the free association of the Surrealists, I believe my work touches upon aspects of my subconscious. Like in dreams, with the mind pulls from its vast data store of all different known images and experiences in a seemingly haphazard way, there's recognition of some truth within the seemingly random. Yet in these paintings there is no final resolution, no absolute answer to satisfy a hungry mind. The viewer is then left to interpret, creating a dynamic in

which answers are formed from the questions posed in the work. Many times I allow an idea or concept to naturally run its course in my creative process only to discover new and exciting answers when the work is introduced to an observer.