

Reflections of Madonna

HUMN 311 – Art Practices and Popular Music

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FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT ESSAY

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When reading the article by Bernard Gendron titled *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club* I was able to draw parallels with my young adulthood and my introduction to the radical scene of Montreal's punk music and its fusion with art. I had never considered the generative impact of what Gendron refers to in the article as 'borderline aesthetic'; an amalgam of street art, graffiti, video, punk music and underground fashion. The experience of punk music and its borderline aesthetic helped me widen my views on art accepting that it can cross all boundaries. The merging of all mediums is well described by Gendron when he states that "There was also the rampant "blurring" of all the boundaries so endemic to the borderline aesthetic, "between high and low," of course, but also between the different media (e.g., "between visual art, performance art and rock concerts") and "between who is 'qualified' to be an artist, a musician, or both." (Gendron 304) The introduction to this underground scene opened my mind to the potential of art. It also allowed me, – an average kid from the suburb with an artistic inclination – to consider my art making as an art practice.

Before my experience with the punk scene, the only thing that I had known that was as radical was Madonna. As mentioned by Stewart¹ during his presentation on Michael Jackson, MuchMusic launched in Canada in 1984 and I instantly became addicted to it. Madonna's videos provided everything I was looking for as a teens; beats, dance moves, 80's fashion with an edge and soon enough; controversy. Some loved her, some didn't. But everyone knew about her. Her videos had a similar impact to the one

¹ Stewart H, Ellie S, and Karen S. presented a Michael Jackson lecture on June 3rd 2015 for the HUMN 311 class titled Art Practices and Popular Music at Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

that Andy Warhol had on America, as stated by Mary Harron in her article titled *Pop Art/ Art Pop: The Andy Warhol Connection* when she states that “If most American didn’t approve of Warhol, and still don’t approve of Warhol, everyone heard about him.” (Harron 356) Madonna influenced how we danced and how we dressed, but through further reflection, I realized she did much more than that.

Today, I found myself challenged to describe who Madonna actually is and the profound influence she had on me. Her constant evolution as well as the many personas she has adopted over the years make all attempts to mould Madonna into one category blur into its contradiction. As mentioned in a Madonna Tribe blog post titled *Madonna: A Critical Analysis*, “Madonna has been interested in holding up a mirror to society to show them that a woman can be intelligent, powerful, and sexual.” It is through the same mirror that I have been able to explore with my art practice.

Life is perceived and understood from personal experiences. However structured, it is multi-layered and multi-faceted. One can never be defined in a simple way since we all act according to the various situations we are presented with. Moreover, who we are in any particular moment is built upon our own personal experiences to that point and is in constant evolution. Others can perceive this complex web of thoughts, knowledge, and actions, differently, and often in contrast from one’s reality. In my art I am interested in the exploration of complex network built on simple structures so as to draw parallels between perception and reality. While I am mostly interested in process over the end

result, evidence of the process are left visible, suggesting that the work might be later revisited, changed, or altered similarly to the way that one's life is in constant flux.

The project I am presenting for the class title Art Practices and Popular Music² is titled *Madonna is, Madonna does, Madonna represents...* It continues the exploration of the simple grid structure previously explored in my latest series of 'Grid' paintings³. The artwork is made from two pieces of paper woven together, which creates a web of thirty by eighteen inches. A highly reflective mirror paper is used for the warp of the weave. A thick velum paper is used for the fillings of the weave. Each warp and filling is half an inch wide woven in a pattern of three up and one down. Both of the fillings and warps are left unwoven at the beginning and end of the web, which suggests that the project is either in progress or not completed. A written word on pencil appears at each instance when the filling passes over the warp. The words come from research and various readings from blog posts, books, articles and interviews on Madonna's career. Each word illustrates what Madonna is, does and represents to me, and perhaps the viewer.

Often contradictory, the words used in the artwork represent Madonna's evolution as an artist. As an example, on the first warp one can read; 'Madonna is a performer, successful, a Megastar, talented, a role model, Italian, reflective, offensive'... It is followed by a long list of contradictory adjectives such as: 'good girl and bad girl, religious and blasphemous, faithful and tortured, sophisticate and childish, in control and collaborative', and the list goes on. Then, on the thirty-third warp, the dialogue changes

² HUMN 311- Art Practices and Popular music by Phil Smith at Emily Carr University of Art + Design

³ The Grid Series can be viewed on my web site: <http://www.marionlandryart.com/art/product/prod-green-linen-grid--1>

to ‘Madonna does take advantage, make mistakes, rebel against authority, re-invent, change, celebrate...’ and so on. That section ends on the thirty-fifth warp with ‘express her desires and push boundaries for us’. It is immediately followed by ‘Madonna represents fame, change, stardom, sexual fantasies’ and continues for another five rows. What Madonna represents concludes on the fortieth and forty first warp by saying: ‘...success, purity, God, innovation, style, AIDS and self-realization. Madonna is you.’

The project explores ideas of reflectivity, both in terms of my own reflection on Madonna’s work and the impact it had on my art practice and Madonna as a reflection of society. When viewing my own reflection in the artwork through the mirror paper weave, the words that described Madonna become superimposed on me, blurring the lines between us. The mirror paper, which is slightly bent by the weave motion, produces a distorted reflection, which is also fragmented by the velum paper warp. The idea here is that the reflection is not perfect, but instead, a complex web of multi-layered views. The transparency of the velum paper incorporates a see-through element previously explored in my series of Grid paintings. Not only can the mirror paper be seen underneath, it can also be interpreted as looking through a lens. When looking at the artwork as a whole, the reflection of the light and surrounding environment in the warped mirror paper recalls the reflection of mirror balls found in dance clubs where I experienced and grew with Madonna’s music.

In closing, never before had I considered the impact of Madonna’s constant evolution and controversial artistic inclination with my art practice. She started by

showing me that one doesn't have to be a virtuoso to make art. One can have fun with what he/she does, and that, becomes contagious. Then, one can constantly re-invent his/her image to suit their message. Mostly she showed me that one can't be defined within one singular box. Life is a complex web that one creates and shapes to his/her own needs and wants. The observer then takes this image and warp it into his/her own needs and wants which creates this complex weave between reality and perception. I conclude my artwork with this single line: 'Madonna is you' as she is a reflection of who we are, aspire or fantasize to be. She has explored many prominent aspect of society from punk to sophisticate and there is somewhere in there a personality that is close to mine and yours.

Works cited

Gendron, Bernard. *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-garde*. Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 2002. Print.

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