

BEAUTIFUL/ DECAY

FOLKERT DE JONG

TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK

PEARL C. HSIUNG

TANYA BATURA

GWAR

MASH-OUT POSSE

THE

GROTESQUE

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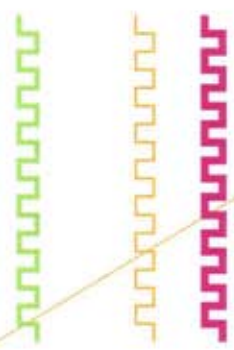
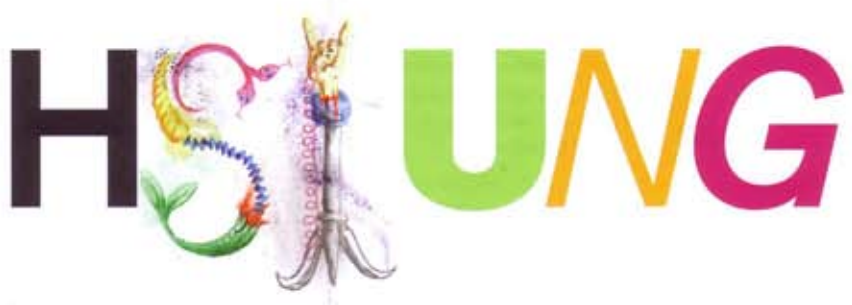




Images courtesy of **Steve Turner Contemporary**, Los Angeles

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Written by **Karla Diaz**



Above: Say Ah Hah, 2007. Enamel on canvas. 11 x 14 in.



If someone says, “The palm trees are pissing!” no one believes it is a possibility that this can happen. But upon entering the collaged world of **Pearl C. Hsiung** and her deliberate use of the *grotesque element of exaggeration, anything is possible. In dealing with these possibilities and bringing them all together in one piece of work (as an editor would an abbreviated visual dictionary of contemporary art practices), Pearl critiques cultural identity through humor, multiplicity, and iconography, fearlessly challenging assumed notions of art, art-making, and perception shifting between the places of her upbringing, from the cities of Taiwan to the streets of Los Angeles.*

Above: *Chatoyance*, 2007. Enamel on canvas. 24 x 30 in.



Above: *Boulder Dash*, 2007. Enamel on canvas. 96 x 72 in.

How would you define the grotesque?

For me, the grotesque starts at the excess of what is being represented, articulated beyond itself, beyond functions of aesthetics or concept, into something visceral that propels you into another plane of interpretation. I think of it as a very organic exaggeration. The grotesque can also be very subjective; one person's grotesque is another one's banal. For me, often forms in nature seem grotesque, but actually it's my interpretation and projections that make it grotesque and sometimes verging on the comic or sinister or uncanny.

It's interesting that you say the grotesque "starts at the excess of what is being represented." American culture seems to dwell on that excess in consumerism—do you think that is an influence on defining it in your work?

I would say that this excess definitely informs my definition of grotesque. It makes me think that it's ubiquitous and common. Excess in consumerism is not unlike a deformed, unsatiable, irrational monster. But I'm not being judgmental—the grotesque can also be comic. But in this case, the excess of consumerism in American culture is a nihilistic comedy, a self-cannibalizing vortex, humorous in a really fucked up way.

Do you consciously use humor in your work, or is it just a part of your personality?

Humor is a very important part of the work, as well as for me personally, as a strategy for entertainment and survival. I don't necessarily make the work with humor consciously in mind, but the ideas I pursue to completion have the allure of humor in them. Theoretically, the humor functions as an impetus for the work to keep interpretation and meaning moving. It's an unstable force in the work and keeps the metaphors and implied serious endeavors in the work from ossifying, and hopefully propels content onto other levels. In culture, humor is such a quickly moving, evolving subject. Humor is constantly changing and addressing culture as it changes, from large important changes to those subtle and undefined.

You are a versatile artist who works in sculpture, painting, video, and photography—how do you choose which form best embraces what you want to say?

I work in painting the most because it is the most convenient medium to work in for me, both conceptually and logistically. Maybe it's the medium I am most articulate in, which is why I like to work in sculpture and video, too. In sculpture and video, I can address the same ideas, but in a different space—so the work goes where those potentials exist. I actually like making video works the most because so much more can happen in them. There can actually be humans in them.



Below: *Saint Perpetuum*, 2007. Enamel on canvas. 96 x 72 in.



You address character through this out-of-context multiplicity of body parts—do you think about multiplicity when you work?

Yes I do, though I am always trying to get away from characters by working with geological, non-human subjects. I guess I am addressing characters/identities that are multiplicities of shifting, undefined forms. If we speak of them as characters, then they are also addressing power—different forms of power, different positions of power, expressions of power. Sometimes instead of power, we can use tension or energy. In one of my works, "Saint Perpetuum, Guanocano, Helens," the volcanoes act as expressive mechanisms, active orifices, articulating power or just energy. They can be seen as a body part as well—a mouth, a vocal box, a lung, a stomach, an anus...or even a zit—which, when big enough, becomes a body part—an organ of it's own! I would say that the parts also embody an identity or are activated by symbols of an identity.

So how do you see the role of the artist?
I would like to think of an artist as an original creator, but it is impossible to deem what "original" is anymore.

I am personally overwhelmed with how [many] stimulations and situations are out there. For me, I am just interested in slowing things down, creating work that offers me another way to think about or deal with issues and concepts—something that takes me through ideas and also out of them. But also, I really want to experience some pleasure out of it all while I'm here to make it.

Below: *Sightly Stunner*, 2007.
Enamel on canvas. 96 x 72 in.



Below: *Zealophilic*, 2007. Enamel on canvas. 72 x 96 in.



Do you see your work referencing the place you were born or where you grew up? I'm thinking of your painting "Slightly Stunner," which to me is a metaphoric piece for Los Angeles.

Yeah, there's definitely a strong willing of metaphor in my work, although I also try to keep them open-ended. Right there, you described "Slightly Stunner" (the gallery titles for this piece are misspelled) in such exact terms, and yet there is a lot of other content and subtleties going on in it on other levels that we would then have written off. What I like about graphic iconography, visual vocabulary that is shared and symbolic, is that it is as flexible and acrobatic—yet unwieldy and impenetrable—as language. I'm definitely influenced by all the visual culture of where I was born and raised. I was born in Taiwan, spent many summers there, as well as grew up here in LA and southern California, so I was exposed to all the cartoons, toys, advertising, street murals, literature of those places. Maybe what left the biggest impression were these images, since it was the strongest link between these places that function (regardless of existing in places in which different languages are spoken) on different languages.



Right: *Monster Gusher*, 2007.
Enamel on canvas. 96 x 72 in.





Left: *Know Me In Team*, 2007.
Enamel on canvas. 48 x 36 in.



When you describe impressions of images, it sounds like a photocopying of sorts, as if you are trying to gather the excess imprints of memory in these filters.

Yes, that's an accurate sense of it. A lot of the images and icons are bastardized from [their] original meaning and location, so it's kind of like they are excess imprints or leftover traces of personal and cultural signs. Sometimes I'm not completely sure why I am attracted to certain symbols and images, or I am attracted to the fact that they are both specific and very porous in meaning, full of more potential readings. Yeah, I would say photocopying is similar to the process [by which] I make work or how the content is collected. Actually, I think my work ends up more like black-and-white photocopies of collages. When you photocopy a collage, you enhance its autonomy, pulling the image and content together, while also deteriorating it as a whole, compromising the quality, literally and figuratively.

What would you say have been and continue to be the biggest influences on your work?

I never know how to answer this question. My interests and influences are not very consistent. This question is like the "About Me" section on MySpace that I can't fill out.

How would you describe your use of color?

Of nature and culture. Color is one puzzle in making work and also a puzzle in itself.

Three grotesque things you love and hate:

1. My bodily functions
2. Other people
3. Popular culture

Below: *No More*, 2007. Enamel on canvas. 24 x 18 in.

