

The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford

21 May - 6 September, 2015

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Jay Hanscom : milkshakes and gasoline.

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Front: Jay Hanscom. 1969: *super goof* (detail), 2015, mixed media & resin on wood.

Back: Jay Hanscom. *Freedom Rider*, 2012, mixed media & resin on wood.

Inside left: Jay Hanscom. *Tombstone: I Killed Him...*, 2015, mixed media & resin on wood.

Inside left: Jay Hanscom. *I Always Wanted to do Something...* (detail), 2012-ongoing, mixed media & resin on found objects (baseball bats).

MILKSHAKES

& GASO LINE

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“The narratives of nostalgia—from the Bible onward—are male stories...”¹

Born in 1974, Jay Hanscom was raised in suburban Coquitlam, BC where he describes an idyllic boyhood replete with forts, frogs and tinkering in his father’s garage. The works in *Milkshakes and Gasoline* are emblems of these boyhood days. The artist’s carefully selected imagery recalls a particular hyper-masculine brand of 20th century popular culture. Through boxcar racers, skulls and ray guns, Hanscom immerses himself, and his audience, in a collective cultural nostalgia, exploring how masculinity is constructed both personally and for whole generations.

As a student at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, Hanscom’s early practice was largely sculptural. Though this body of work is almost entirely two-dimensional, it maintains a sculptural feel. The works are built up in layers of paint, oil stick, and collaged materials tightly epoxied to the surface. The glossy surfaces and autobody pinstripes mimic the slick veneer of hot rods and motorcycles, calling to mind the kind of archetypal car-culture manliness associated with Hollywood icons like James Dean and Steve McQueen. Hanscom also connects personal memories to the symbols that are culturally available to him, claiming “the actual process of preparing the studio and surface of the work has a very trade-based, blue collar feeling to it, taking me back even further to countless hours spent alongside my father in his workshop.”

Image and text in the works are combined in a seemingly haphazard fashion that resembles the inside of a high-school boy’s locker. Muscular, collaged typefaces echo

the aesthetics of garage posters and album covers, brandishing macho slogans excerpted from b-movies and spaghetti westerns. But in the apparent disorder there is conspicuous repetition. Particular images and words recur, almost obsessively: the five- and ten-cent signs, the dartboard, the skull. Borrowed phrases and stylized pop fonts are contrasted with tentative gestural marks, like the persistent line drawing resembling an organizational diagram or family tree that appears throughout. The violent scribbles and loosely scrawled words, in particular the word “loot,” give the impression that Hanscom is negotiating a subjectivity that lies somewhere between his own personal memory and the shared cultural memory that has informed his generation.

The only truly sculptural element in the exhibition, *I Always Wanted to do Something...* is a series of collaged baseball bats, epoxied to the point of dripping. Here, the ultimate symbol of summertime boyhood games is transformed into something phallic and potentially violent. Hanscom’s nostalgia is not straightforward; it continually touches on the crucial moment when the simple things of boyhood—toy guns, fast cars, baseball bats—become the complicated matter of adult masculinity.

The shiny surfaces of Hanscom’s work appear to celebrate an idealized, rough-and-ready manliness associated with 20th century popular culture. Whether these works are lamentations for a past when gender seemed less complicated or sardonic challenges to this superficial construct, Hanscom offers us a collection of pastiche memories that is at once comforting and disquieting.

¹ Hutcheon, Linda and Mario J. Valdés. “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue.” *Polygrafías: Revista de literatura comparada* 3 (1998-2000): 22.

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