

DAD PRANKS

FEEL YOURSELF STRANGE

BY ELENA HARVEY COLLINS

Human beings often imbue inanimate objects with emotional qualities. Loving things is out of style, clutter weighs you down, in our age of faux-zen, weightless, always available lifestyles in which only a selection of carefully curated objects should ever make it into our lives and homes.

dadpranks are a six-women artist collective who get together for short periods of time, with bags full of dollar store goodies and a video camera, and riff off of each other's ideas to make short, strange, gleeful videos. The collective's name is a playful take on the internet phenomenon of parents pranking their children for YouTube "likes." In these short, untitled works, common household items--a broom with dangling dust bunnies, ice cube trays--are used in ways unintended, as anonymous hands (female, manicured) carry out bizarre tasks that suggest a celebration of deliberate uselessness or an unlearning of the domestic. In one video, fingers adorned with florescent fake nails peel tin foil off a Cadburys Creme Egg. The nails are impractically long; as the egg melts, the hand becomes coated in sticky chocolate, the precious item transformed into a scatological clump. In another video, tiny tooth-like gravel is flossed, hesitantly at first, by one disembodied hand. This hand is quickly joined by another and then more, each deliberately grooming the tooth gravel, producing toe curling sensory overload. The use of color--brightly hued objects and radiant blue screens--references the shrill, neon aesthetic of cheap real

and digital retail environments, functioning as crude appeals to the (presumed) female consumer. Some of the videos parody marketing campaigns for cleaning products like Swiffer, slyly undermining the idea that all "we" ever wanted was a new dishwasher or a toilet seat we could eat off, squirty mops that come in purple, or decorative tools. In another work, floral-patterned pliers delicately unpick a hair extension braid against a background of lavender faux marble. An odd transference occurs in these works. The objects seem to want to think and feel; the hands become object-like and dumb.

In most of dadpranks's videos to date, female hands are the only parts of the body presented onscreen. One video, however, departs from this model. In it, a Mac computer is used to prepare a spaghetti dinner. The cover is removed from the computer tower and the little laser-cut holes making up a lattice of air vents are used as a cheese grater and a strainer. As the boiling spaghetti is dumped on the vent, steaming water streams over the guts of the computer. There is something delicious about the destruction of fetishized, expensive electronics. Almost as delicious as the ham-fisted approximation of a dinner that follows--whole vegetables are slapped on the plate after the spaghetti, a distastefully blue glass of liquid beside it. Slowly, a red faced person--a *real* Dad--lowers himself until he is seated at the computer-cum-dinner table, raising his head in a dead pan fashion, eyes twinkling, in on the joke.



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2.

1-2. dadpranks
2014
Screenshots from HD videos
Courtesy of the artists

DAD PRANKS

A CROWD-SOURCED ESSAY ON THE NATURE OF DADPRANKS

(CHRISTINA VASSALLO REMIX)

The following nonsensical yet deceptively informative essay is comprised of visceral responses to a set of 6 questions posed to 15 people about dadpranks:

- How does this work make you feel?
- How would you describe this work to somebody else?
- What do you think the creative process behind this work is like?
- Describe who you think made this work.
- What themes do you detect emerging from these videos?
- What kind of hashtag would you give it?

The responses were delivered via email and in-person interviews conducted in public places. Then, they were picked apart, strung together, and augmented with equally visceral thoughts on dadpranks' work by this author. Please note: this essay is only about 7% accurate, depending on your perspective, and approximately 55% contradictory, regardless of your POV.

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dadpranks, a collaborative effort comprised of six educated middle class white women, want to effect change through their art while eliciting a response to visual stimuli. A nutty cocktail of

digital iGenerationism and post-consumer waste, #dadpranks do not understand hashtags, but still manage to #boycotthershey using #strange #realhumor. Like a Nike model training on a Sodastream™ beach with a Febreze® sunset peeling off, their work conjures a nostalgic yearning for Easter Sundays spent at grandma's house, when gooey residue from CADBURY CREME EGG Candy would cling to your hands.

Dystopia, aggressive femininity, and any kind of disruption to mundane domesticity are all fodder for these post-adolescent/pre-adult artists. The sexy discomfort of their work results from the intersection of popular internet aesthetics + intuitive, real-life, human-to-human processes, and is amplified by the familiar dance of getting online, offline, and back on again. Evoking the absurdity of Matthew Barney's The CREMASTER Cycle, each dadpranks video challenges the viewer's comfort zone in different ways by usurping materialism through penetration.

In what can be described as ASMR¹ videos gone off the rails, dadpranks conducts auditory/visual experiments with consumer packaging, the noises we make while eating, and the experience of just being human. For example, in one video, a blue nylon broom with dangling dust bunnies is plucked by highly manicured nails, as though it were a harp. A pile of

fake teeth is “flossed” by a rapidly increasing number of vigorous hygienists in another video. A cell phone sandwich is deconstructed by the vibration of an incoming call in a video so short it feels more like a sketch than a finished piece. These are depictions of glamorized non-glamorous moments, stemming from a bad day at the dentist and verging on a group gross out seminar.

dadpranks’ creative process is at once like being in a sandbox, an exquisite corpse therapy sesh, and a potluck. It starts with the viewing of lots of YouTube and instructional videos and culminates in the eating of many different kinds of snacks-- both sugary and neon, like their work. The production process itself is a digital video shoot, behind which is a series of intelligent decisions: specific color choices, costumes surrounding those choices, integration of objects matching the palette, lighting, and background sound emphasis.

Similar to the exploded contents of a piñata filled with 99¢ store detritus, dadpranks calls attention to the unplanned beauty that can be found in household objects and activities, and the synergy between them. The viewer is left with a profound sense of how our quotidian actions make up the majority of our lives. How what we present to the world is largely the small minutiae we don’t consider, instead of the larger calculated gestures for which we would prefer to be remembered.

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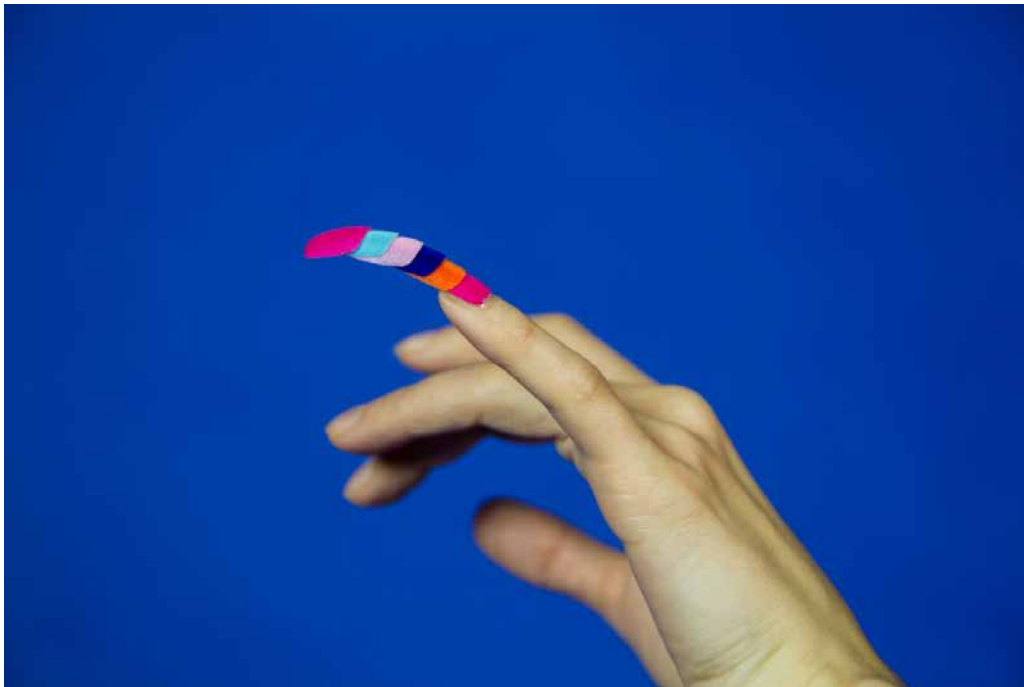
Special thanks to co-authors: Amber J. Anderson, Chloë Bass, Hilary Bertisch, Aliya Bonar, Maureen Dixon, Bruce Edwards, Kirsten Goddard, Vitus Pelsey, Iris Rozman, the 3 men standing outside of Edison’s, the two women standing outside of Civilization, and the daddies.

1. Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) is a perceptual phenomenon characterized by a pleasurable tingling sensation felt in the head, scalp, or extremities, in response to visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, or cognitive stimuli. See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_sensory_meridian_response

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2.



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dadpranks
2015
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