

## Review Donald O’Finn: by 99 HOOKER

Yea, though I walk through the Silicon Valley of the shadow of death and Supervixens

Appropriating media from disparate samples, O’Finn “re-purposes, re-contextualizes, effects, alters, and weaves his constructions” into “the dreams a Television might have.” O’Finn’s poetic power reveals what lurks beneath glib, ridiculous and shoddy media – the same old subconscious terrors and desires which have bedeviled people for centuries. More than 100 years of visual indifference and excess have yet to banish the chthonic forces which previous civilizations sought to engage through myth. And O’Finn is the man to recover such – not as a theoretical psychologist, but as a practicing shaman cutting up media to fashion a/v voodoo dolls. Within B-movies, exploitation, adverts and other cheap thrills O’Finn recovers human suffering, fear, anxiety, malfunctioning, oh, and profound humor – the stuff audiences and producers imagined they didn’t want, didn’t need – we who still dream of shebots partners, shameless indulgences and guilt free spectating. O’Finn knows better.

The cowboy walk-on bumping into an animated dog puppet, the endlessly blinking face, all evoke more humanity than the real-life subway riders glue trapped to their cell phones. Godzilla knock-offs become tragic figures in the modern sense – lacking tragic sense. “The greatest trick media ever pulled was convincing the world that real life doesn’t exist.” Or isn’t worth the effort.

In O’Finn’s hands, remixed media reveals enduring, all-too-human needs within the entertaining shit storm of denial. His appropriations skewer the absurd proposition that what we see is what we get, as if all we need to do in this life is watch. Watching is never neutral. People are not TVs receiving signals. Passive viewing lazily reproduces the status quo media sells to the mind’s eye. The spectacle is determined not by content but by how we look at it. Most of us don’t own this process of consumption, even fewer of us throw ourselves into it as O’Finn does. Seeing is a creative act ranging from numb reiteration to radical revision. Watching O’Finn’s video is to see how a true individual, artist consumes and reproduces new social relations. We can learn a lot from how O’Finn sees.

O’Finn is an impassioned viewer seizing on, obsessing over what in poker is called The Tell, the unconscious or subconscious gesture, tic which reveals the opponents position.

Bank of America commercials are painfully funny. Food is creepy. So is eating. Sexuality is obsessively not there, not here: intimacy imaginary. Compressing narratives into essences extracts nourishment from what is mostly corn syrup and cardboard filler. The mechanics of genre hide simple, difficult truths. O’Finn trusts himself and his audience. At his darkest, he displays and embodies the faith that people can look more deeply, meaningfully at our spectacle, even its shit, especially its shit. Guess whose processing dinner?

By digesting it, by making it resued, O'Finn both creates and uncovers meaning above and beyond the trite spectacle that wants its viewers to not pay attention, to shrug "it is all shit anyway. It doesn't matter. Don't look to closely." Ironically, O'Finn's alterations helps us see what actually is hidden in the endless slush of what isn't. Americans spend on average at least 10 hours a day looking at a screen – it isn't unimportant.

Like all modern artists who do the work to develop a personal style, it leads him and his viewers into the larger social sense of what it is to be human in the age of mechanical reproduction. His individual style speaks to common hungers, frustrations, delights, aspirations, fears and boredom. In making TV his own, O'Finn returns content to its most fundamental and human wellsprings. Media is all-too-often a reaction formulation, a smokescreen, a cliché, a wall-papering over such animating passions. Stan Brakhage said "Whatever trail we leave, however composed or articulate or inarticulate, ought to at least have the grist if it has our whole meat, nervous system intrinsically involved." Intrinsically involved = applying one's self and labor to the material of the world, to make choices, edits, connections – the material of our world increasingly being the society of the spectacle.

The spectacle's relentless production of that most immaterial material– electronic images – for consumption, is but a skeleton of true culture wherein consumers might feel that their deepest, strangest experiences have a place. O'Finn provides such context by putting meat, his and ours, on the bones. It is no surprise O'Finn's collaging puts skeletons beneath characters, puts food into mouths. "X-ray vision" posits nakedness onto a dancer. A flashlight effect reveals oddities to a group of 1950s archeologists.

He not only adds, he subtracts. Emptiness is made fully empty by juxtaposing the expected with the absurd or by isolating reaction shots to something that never appears or building a series of such – a repetition of anticipation until the absent "reveal" dissolves into ennui or humor. The spectacle is bluffing. Its hand is a loser.

A wonderful, concise piece "Night Hunter" loops a scene from the horror movie of the same name. A properly appealing cliché of a coed flicks on a light and walks down a hallway (with creepy music) only to open a door to re-enter and reappear at the top of the screen again to flick on the light, adjust her shirt, to walk down the hall to open the door and reenter, flick on the light and walk toward the door ... Not only does this piece stand on its own, but it summarizes a movie and a genre. It breaks down, rebuilds both an individual piece and larger looks. By reducing and expanding the content "Night Hunter" provides what is obscured by the actual film. Horror films rarely dwell with horror, they only nod to it in passing. The true dread in Lang's M has been on the fritz for a long time. O'Finn stops the viewer, creates a humorous review of the devolution of the horror movie, while at the same time harkening back to its now-obscured source: a near-universal anxiety and curiosity to look behind the door, to look for the source of that sound, the trail of blood, where the killer is ... the unknown door we will all walk through. And in removing the killer and the kill, O'Finn also removes the trite satisfaction of what is always a life-long walk down a darkened corridor that we all know hides our

killer. “Night Hunter” delivers what the smooth mechanics exploit but do not consider – the anticipation of the night each human carries within. O’Finn is not content to merely satirize the shit; he reanimates it with what has been lost. “Night Hunter” is a great horror movie, better than the original, yet still a horror movie with its camp gestures.

The trivial made meaty. Too often the trivial is dismissed as trivial. O’Finn does the hard, emotional creative work of learning to love the mediocre for what it reveals and hides. And ultimately this is why we need artists – they show us how to care, ways of loving whatever they touch. There is light in the darkness and lightness in his dark.

What does TV dream? Of becoming human. The age-old AI trope. And the more we live within cyberjunkspace the more we bring this about. But AI does not become more human. The gap is closed by humans become more kin to their virtual realities as constructed, liked and reposted in media. O’Finn reverse engineers the society of the spectacle to review and renew all that the Godzilla imposters, Hollywood, Bollywood and proliferating apps promise to obscure. O’Finn autopsies and reanimates the guts just as the Monster informs us about Dr. Frankenstein.

O’Finn is important, not merely because he is a master craftsman of crap with his wit, charm, humor and courage, but because he returns the viewer to his or her ever-vanishing humanity. His work is uncomfortable, demanding in the old sense of challenging viewers to see more. His masterpiece “Bobbitt” reworks the real-life castrator’s visage in a series of Goya-like moving portraits to deliver a haunting horror the news could never show. “Bobbitt” is not an easy opportunity for a joke but a chance to meditate on human darkness. “Bobbitt” evidences the richness an artist can reveal when he puts his soul into looking into an image redeemed by the belief that it actually represents something.

## Author – 99 Hooker

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The Minnesota Star Tribune wrote of 99-Hooker:

“If this is what it takes to keep someone from killing another person, more power to art”

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