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BREADFRUIT FANTASIES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

MATTHEW SPAHR

Bachelor of Fine Arts, California State University of Long Beach, 2003

Director: SIEMON ALLEN
PROFESSOR, SCULPTURE

Director: KENDALL BUSTER
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, SCULPTURE

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
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Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter	
1 Masculine Identity	5
2 Parallel Narratives.....	9
3 Old Men in Little Cars: interviews with the nameless.....	12
4 Bibliography	15
5 Vita.....	16

Abstract

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Major Director: Siemon Allen
Professor, Sculpture





Breadfruit is a strange thing. It's a starchy potato-like sustenance not particularly noteworthy by most accounts. But its history is amazing, an epic journey. Relocated from the Samoan island of Upalu to Oahu, Hawaii in the 12th Century as well as transplanted from Tahiti, as an economical food source for slaves in the West Indies in 1780 the lowly breadfruit has been held in the hands of Fletcher Christian, Captain Bligh, James Cook, King Kamehameha and innumerable other nameless individuals including Matt Spahr. This fruit contains the weight of colonialism, capitalism, exploration and tropical fantasy under its skin. The collision of histories such as these and the identities of related participants are the focus of the following essay.

Masculine Identity

I lived the first 8 years of my life in the small fishing town Homer, Alaska. When I was 8 years old my family relocated to Huntington Beach, California, a place literally known as “Surf City,” where I remained until two years ago. Splitting my childhood between these two ocean-going communities, along with the experience of being raised by a father whose occupations on the docks ranged from port master to harbor patrol, fostered my interests in nautical and surf cultures. Both of these cultures are immersed in obvious and specific developments of masculine identities. Although each has a different use value within our society the structures are very similar. (A salty dog is a salty dog in either case!)

Masculine identity is not something I considered much growing up. It seemed to me to be a very intuitive process, necessary for socialization. Surrounded by strong masculine figures, many of which I would venture to call macho, emulation seemed in hindsight to be an inevitability. Such emulation was as necessary as the social organization of the pack creatures seen on the discovery channel. It was not until an evaluation of my own masculinity occurred in later years that I began

to consider the real polarity that existed in personal identity constructed out of equal parts mariner and surfer.

While both are rich in tradition, unspoken codes and ethics, these two ideals – the mariner and the surfer- rarely inhabit the same space. For the mariner, a traditional work ethic, the enduring of hardships, the display of ruggedness, and distinct rank can all be encapsulated in what might be called a sense of duty. Although the romantic notion of a mariner's love for the exploration and freedom allowed by the sea is seductive, one cannot deny that first and foremost being a mariner is a *job*. Surf culture on the other hand, although it shares many of the same affections, hierarchies and fantasies, is for the most part and has traditionally been perceived of as recreation. Having been reintroduced to the *Haole* (white man) after Hawaii's annexation in 1898 surfing in its modern form was initially a draw for tourism.

Upon historical analysis one sees that there is little difference between an Olo (an early solid hardwood surfboard) and a small fishing boat. Nautical understanding has developed immensely over the last thousand years, and yet it would be difficult to discredit the nautical skills of the Hawaiians, their understanding of the ocean and it's currents and navigation. Traveling from Polynesia as early as 600 A.D. with only the stars and avian flight patterns to guide them, their skill parallels the Nordic Mariners of the same time.

One might equate surfing with leisure outrigger or yacht sailing. Certainly such recreational boating seems far removed from its origins as a survival tool for fishing and exploration. The Kahuna, the priest and guardians of an unwritten culture and master builders passed on boatmaking skills to apprentices. With the death of the Kahuna, Hawaiian oral history and therefore the history of boat making became a half remembered myth.

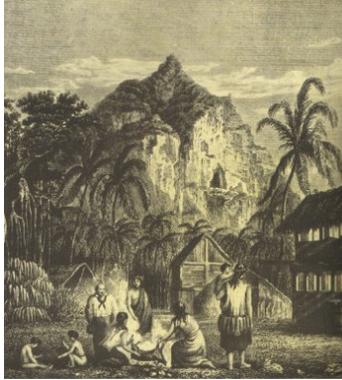
What is considered “surfing” by today’s standards might be more accurately referred to as “modern surf culture” developed primarily from a rebirth in the early 1900’s and continuing to evolve until the present. One might then suppose that the difference between surfing at its origins is simply the contrast between work and recreation. And yet the conduct of a recreational mariner is not so unlike that of a commissioned one, leaving one to the conclusion that the real difference between the two is related more to culture.

I bring this up not as a revelation, as I am sure it is not, but rather as a point to argue for the unintentional benefits the colonization of Hawaii must surely have had on European culture. Ever since Captain James Cook returned from his 1778 exploratory voyage with sketches of aboriginals gliding across the ocean on planks surfing has fascinated the *haole*. So seductive is the idea of surfing that not even a hundred years of furrowed protestant missionary brows could stamp it out!

But where does this seduction lie? Contemporary surf culture would suggest that it is in the visceral experience and in the symbol of a certain lifestyle. The rise of the Middle American surf market attests to this. Admittedly once again the idea that surfing's appeal is as a life style is no great revelation. Yet a point worth making is that we must credit the Hawaiian with the introduction of this modern leisure fantasy.



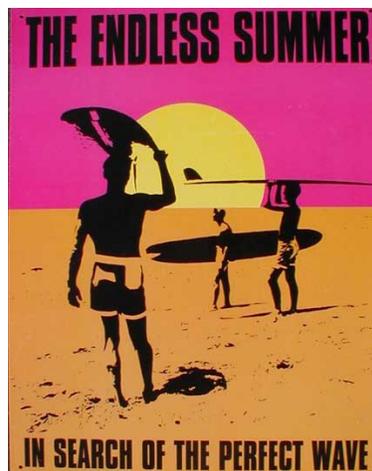
Parallel Narratives



The polar struggle of masculine identity is one of duty versus desire, sailor versus surfer, an internal struggle. A prime metaphor for the struggle of masculine identity can be found in the story of the H.M.S. Bounty. Widely known for a number of memorable cinematic interpretations, *The Bounty's Mutiny* encapsulates both the paradisiacal fantasies of Fletcher Christian and the duty and skill of Captain Bligh.

Much debate surrounds the story. Some historians and storytellers identify with the position represented by Fletcher Christian and others Captain Bligh. But I am not interested defending the actions of either side. Rather the facts of the voyage are far more interesting to me. After ten months at sea, and having not been able to make it around the Cape of Hope, Bligh and his crew of 45 took the long route around Africa and reached Tahiti. Charged with collecting breadfruit specimens the crew spent several months collecting saplings and in the process become acquainted with the native people. Upon the return voyage a frustrated faction headed by Fletcher Christian took control of the ship and set Bligh and 18

crewmembers adrift. While Bligh navigated 3618 Nautical miles back to English territory Fletcher Christian and the remaining mutineers returned to Tahiti, sailed to a series of obscure Islands, and ultimately burned the Bounty. Direct descendents of the mutineers still inhabit these islands today. Bligh returned to Tahiti just two years later and successfully transplanted over 2000 breadfruit plants to the West Indies for sustenance experiments to feed the growing number of slaves. Captain Bligh was a significant player force in Britain's Colonization efforts (having been Captain James Cook's Sailing Captain before the Bounty and The Governor of New South Whales after).



At this point I would like to introduce exploratory endeavor of a different kind.

In 1966 Bruce Brown's documentary "The Endless Summer" introduced the ultimate surf pilgrimage to moviegoers and provided a mass audience with a taste of surf culture. The pioneer film depicts two surfers following the summer season around the globe stopping at various beaches throughout the world to pursue both the endless summer and the perfect wave. This new form of colonization relates

closely to the colonization of Bligh's day in several respects. Exploring new resources for the surf community, paving the way for future surfers to inhabit untouched regions, and ultimately to greatly affect the communities visited, the two surfers operate in a manner not so far removed from these early nautical explorers. Although surf culture is perhaps most closely aligned with the freewheeling spirit of a Christian Fletcher, it is worth noting that ironically almost every location visited in the *Endless Summer* was first visited almost 200 years earlier by Captain Bligh.

Old men in Little Cars: interviews with the nameless

How long have you been a member?

Well, I have been a Freemason for 32 years.

What is the history of your Lodge?

Our lodge is the oldest lodge on the continent.

When was it established?

The first Masonic lodge built in the United States was erected in 1785.

Do members pay dues?

Yes, members pay dues but that varies according to the individual lodges by laws.

Do individual lodges communicate with one another?

Once you become a member Freemason's everywhere as part of an international fraternal society recognizes you.

What does it take to be a member?

First, one must ask to become a mason, we do not invite anyone, second, and two brothers must vouch for your character.

What are the origins of freemasonry?

Although modern freemasonry dates back to 1717, it is argued to date as far back as the 13th century.

Can you explain a little bit about The Great Architect?

A Freemason must believe in a supreme being, although there is no specifications on religion, we refer to this higher being as the great architect.

Are the free masons a secret fraternal society, if so why?

Well, we do not intend for our presence to be secret, but we do have rituals and beliefs that we think are best kept within the brotherhood.

What is the relationship between Shriners, Templars and Masons?

In order to become a member of The Knight Templar or the Mystic Shrine one must first be a mason. Orders like these are catered to specific interests like religion, humor, or in the case of the 32nd right history.

Have doctrines and rituals changed over the years or are have they maintained?

Well although regalia has changed in some small ways for the most part it has remained the same.

Has the mason role in society changed, if so how?

Our purpose has always been to serve God, family, fellowman and country. We have always been interested in bettering the individual and being there for the whole of humanity.

What is the apron's significance is intended to hold anything?

The apron like much of our regalia is a reference to the functional wardrobe of the medieval mason, it does not hold anything.

Is there or has there been any sort of racial or class separation within the masons?

Although we do not discriminate against race or religion, The Grand Lodge of Virginia is primarily white, and the Prince Hall Lodge is primarily black.

What function does Masonry serve in the community as well as for members?

We believe in bettering mankind, we are responsible for many charities, hospitals and research.

Do you see yourself as leading spiritually scientific lives?

Yes.

Do the freemasons have a political agenda?

Only to improve humanity.

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VITA

Born 1977, Granada Hills California

EDUCATION:

M.F.A. Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Sculpture (anticipated), 2007

B.F.A. California State University of Long Beach (CSULB), Sculpture, 2003

A.A. Orange Coast College (OCC), 1999

HONORS & AWARDS:

- 2006 Graduate Research Grant, VCU
- Graduate Teaching Assistantship Award, VCU
- School of the Arts Travel Grant, VCU
- 2005 Graduate Teaching Assistantship Award, VCU
- 2003 Graduate Cum Laude, CSULB
- 2002 Fine Arts Affiliates Scholarship CSULB
- 2000 California Blacksmith's Association Certification
- 1999 Lebraine Scholarship, OCC

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE:

- 2007 Graduate Instructor, Robotics in Art
- 2006 Graduate Instructor, Electrical/Mechanical Sculpture
- Graduate Instructor, Summer Practicum
- Graduate Teaching Assistant, Basic Sculpture
- 2005 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Sculpture for Non-majors VCU
- 2003 Teaching Assistant for Florian Claar, CSULB
- Assistant Fabricator for Florian Claar (artist/professor)

EXHIBITIONS:

- 2007 We and Us, Playspace gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2006 Scope Miami, ADA Gallery, Miami, FL
- Scope London, ADA Gallery, London, England
- Debate Team, Fab Gallery, VCU Richmond, VA
- Sweetness, ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA
- Scope Hamptons, ADA Gallery, Hamptons, NY
- AAF, ADA Gallery, NY, NY
- Like Dowsing, Corrugated Box, Richmond, VA
- Tin Cans With Strings, Accident Gallery, Eureka, CA
- Fast Cheap and Out of Control, Flat International Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2005 W/E, Claremont University, Claremont, CA
- Graduate Sculpture, FAB Gallery, VCU, Richmond, VA

- 2004 Extended Deadlines, Werby Gallery, CSULB, Long Beach, CA
Sculpture Exhibit, Marilyn Rae Gallery, CSULB, Long Beach, CA
2003 On and Off the Wall 3, Marilyn Rae Gallery CSULB, Long Beach, CA
2002 Can't decide which, Merlino Gallery, CSULB, Long Beach, CA
Mind Body Problem, Merlino Gallery, CSULB, Long Beach, CA
Mechanical Format, Marilyn Rae Gallery, CSULB, Long Beach, CA
Insights, CSULB Gallery, Long Beach, CA
2001 Fresh Ink, Design Gallery, CSULB, Long Beach, CA
program 12, 2051 S. Santa Fe, Los Angeles, CA
2000 Fantasy Caboose, Design Gallery, C.S.U.L.B., Long Beach, CA
the Ark, the Ark Gallery, Santa Ana, California, CA
1999 Centered on the Center, Huntington Art Center, Huntington Beach, Ca

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS:

- 2007 Style Weekly, May 2
NY Arts Magazine, March /April
2006 Style Weekly, Sept. 13
The Brick, Sept.6