

Asher Penn, The Banana Question

1.

Almost 5 years ago, I took a photo of a pineapple on the street. I had seen it in the alley that I used to get into my apartment. I had a point and shoot camera with me, and took 3 photos of it. I came back out 5 minutes later with my digital SLR to get a better shot. Funnily enough a car had ran over it. The pineapple looked even better... the stem part was still intact, but the body had been flattened and was kind of pulpy. It was a good thing to photograph- a temporary sculpture. You didn't have to take it home. Photographing it was better.

Last year my friend Harsh made a poster with the pineapple photograph. It was captioned *The Truth Won't Help You*, something our friend Nathan had seen written on a bathroom wall. The poster reminded me of a something you would see in the halls of an elementary school. Bike helmets? Non-Smoking? It was selling something but nothing you could buy.

2.

Around that time I took the pineapple photo I had began making paintings. I would take paper from different sources- magazines, movie posters, photocopies and photos- and tape them together to make a big piece of paper that fit the size of my wall. Then I would paint something on them.

The first things I painted were hearts. I liked how they filled the page. They kind of framed the background from the inside. I liked that they were symmetrical, like a Rorschach. The hearts were positive, generous and open. They were also kind of dumb.

I began to paint question marks. They looked good next to the hearts, like a logical progression- It was a symbol but different... you could find it on your keyboard. It had a font. I had once made an art show called *Just Say Maybe*. The question marks were kind of the same thing: "Do you see what I see?"

I began painting swastikas- Buddhist style, not diamond shaped, but a square. They seemed to answer the hearts and question marks- that duo had felt a bit saccharine. The swastikas brought a negativity and violence to the dynamic. It made things more complicated, which seemed more realistic. More honest.

6 months ago I did a show where I hung old XL t-shirt's of mine on pieces of dowling. The presentation style was inspired by the way Japanese kimonos were displayed. While researching for the show I learned about freestanding kimono displays. They seemed more like sculptures and I wanted to make some. When looking at the floor plan for Young Art I realized there was room for 3 of these in the gallery. I didn't know what to put on the shirts. I had a framework without content. This was an old problem. I decided to fill the 3 shirts with the three symbols. Heart, Question Mark, Swastika.

3.

Last year I decided to take photos of an apple with an incense stick in it. I took about 30 photographs. Only about 13 had smoke that showed up. The photos had an "eastern" quality, but also felt very American.... Apples. They reminded me of the pineapple photo. These pictures could be an ad. They both had fruit in them. Temporary sculpture. There were a lot of similarities.

4.

The profile drawings are something I've been doing for years. Maybe talking on the phone or at a restaurant with paper tablemats and crayon. They were fast and easy and looked good. I began doing them on sheets of 8.5 x 11. Every one was different, no matter how many you did. You could change the mood or expression with the smallest move of the hand. It reminded me of breathing or walking down the street or talking to someone. I could do as many as I want. It could go on forever.