

August S.

San Francisco, CA, Planet Earth

KandiLand

GUMBALLS, paint, walls, cameras

My three pieces in KandiLand I made were driven by the intergration of pleasure based sex into masculinity.

Piece 1: *POP BLOW SP!T* is a mosaic made of gumballs. I bought 1700 gumballs after my cousin, Burke, gave me 100 dollars to spend on gumballs back in July. Burke got the 100 dollars after winning a bet against another cousin in water skiing. I had been talking about creating a gumball closet in which I fill a closet with gumballs and when someone opens the door all of the gumballs spill out onto the person. Burke only bet 10 dollars, and said if he won the bet he would give me the 100 dollars to spend on gumballs.

EPICROOM is a room that I sealed myself in for an hour to splatter paint. I used my rope dart, an 11 foot rope with a ball attached to the end, and my hands to splatter a rainbow of colour across four, 6 by 6.8 foot walls.

bubblmovement is a film piece I made in which I BLOW and POP gum. I had fun with gum, and had fun filming and editing this piece. Fun.

BUBBLEWOORD

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August S.
The Oxbow School OS45

I

There is a place called the grove

Where masculinity stems from the palms of our future fathers, tightly clenched until his knuckles are white. He uses what could be love to knock insecurities out of his mouth, getting his victim to throw up everything he is too afraid to say himself. He has been growing to fear the soil his fathers left, anxious he will rise Never Green from the remnants of decades of validating violence.

The dictionary defines grove as a forested area with no undergrowth. I see these chimeras of boys fueling what it means to be a man into his fire breathing bark. How can he be burned by the uprising wildfire when he is the one spitting the fire, —

They stand as a forest, encircling with bark and no bite. They say that redwoods respond to wildfires by dropping all their seeds, and when the fire ends saplings grow as children of fire. How can he not spit fire when it is his creation; all he knows is this burning love so hot that it hurts, so when I say he loves him, I am talking about his bloody fists, literally spitting fire for him, bark blaring, insides trembling with emotional turmoil, unsupported by any undergrowth, and rotten with dead possibilities. He is convinced his insides are dry and will crumble at the touch of another, so he never lets any past his bark. This tangled grove of what it means to be a man planted by the seeds our fathers founded in our palms balled up so tightly because he just wants to tell him everything will grow evergreen, and he just wants to tell him yes you are a man able to stand with roots that extend beyond spitting fire, violence does not define your masculinity, and yes You have the choice to grow into the man you know is inside yourself.

-content warning - sexual violence.

II

I was in 7th grade seeing my extended family for Thanksgiving. While at dinner, my cousin asked to all 9 of us what we thought about the quote, “everything is about sex, except sex, which is about power.” My aunt responded, “what did you just say in front of sweet Owen, little Owen”, and I felt embarrassed. Too embarrassed to say anything. That quote struck close to home: it was intimate. Not that I had any intimate relationships back then, but I had inclinations. A seed was growing. Potted in the television, I would watch Ben Ten as a child. Violence seemed like a productive means to deal with problems. My brother and I fought.

I remember breaking a window he was behind.

I remember throwing a softball at his eye.

I remember him giving me a black eye after not letting him use the PlayStation.

I remember him slamming my head against the ground, my spit pooled beneath me, and my mom watched. She said it’s healthy that brothers fight it out sometimes.

I say it’s normalized.

It’s expected.

It’s encouraged.

It’s rewarded.

It’s masculine. Violence is not only the fists used to harm, violence is also the hands holding on to masculinity for dear life. This dependency lives in televisions across America. I would watch Ben Ten as a child. This young boy would punch, and people loved him for it: He was a hero. This dependency lives in the language we use for sex: fuck, screw, nail, rail, in her guts, fuck her brains out, bust. I cannot talk about sex without being violent because sexuality has been dependent on violence for years, so when my aunt claimed me to be too young and too

innocent; No, I was too stuck. Violence was the rope that kept me in touch with masculinity, hoping as long as I stayed still it would not leave me.

Taught ropes tie ignored questions to punches in the stomach, being called gay, and too many words that were never said in too many lunchrooms. He understands whatever the opposite of words are, but would never be heard asking, 'how are you.' He can remember what she looked like, but when asked what her name was he pretends not to remember. Remember, a name is intimate. The boys that men once were played with nerf guns, and even though those toys are long out of their hands, the term shooting his shot is used to refer to getting laid. These men trying to get laid first hit on women, yes there is a connection between hitting and laying.

When I reviewed my portfolio with CalArts on portfolio day, 5 out of my 10 art pieces were described as violent, and I agreed. Now looking back I know the difference is I was not harming, I was holding space. I am proud I held space for my violence. I do not want to internalize, and I do not want to displace my violence onto another. Holding space allowed me to live with violence, and make the choice not to embody it. When men do not see the possibility for choice, masculinity will funnel them into violence because masculinity affirms dominance, self-reliance, and entitlement. This is why he does not communicate with her, he feels expectations to just know what to do. This is why the porn industry shows women in pain; there is power in violence, and that craving is why 1 in 5 women have experienced attempted or completed rape as of 2015 (Smith, S. G., Zhang, X., Basile, K. C., Merrick, M. T., Wang, J., Kresnow, M., & Chen, J.), so when I heard the quote, "everything is about sex, except sex, which is about power," I could already feel the dark waters of toxic masculinity rising over my head. We were more than acquaintances at this point. But here I am having swam the waters, making it to a point where I can look back and see the waves I left behind.

For 9 months I was terrified to kiss someone. The pressure I put on myself to know what to do paralyzed me. I would look at mouths like gates of judgement, validating me if I performed well, and otherwise biting my tongue off. I had no consideration of what I wanted because all I knew is wanting to be a man. I craved that power that I thought would come with being an ideal partner. When I did have my first kiss, she made the moves. After a second, I subconsciously pushed her head away. I was terrified that I was kissing poorly, and instinctively ended the kiss. 7 months later I had my second kiss. This one was planned. It took me hyping myself up in the mirror, repetitively saying, "Owen, you can do this. I want to do this." I went through the motions a few times too. Importantly, I told myself that this experience is just as much about myself as it is her, and my pleasure is very much relevant and deserved (not from anyone, but in experiences). This mindset allowed me to have a pleasure based sexual experience in which I felt comfortable asking for consent and did not put pressure on myself to just know what she wants.

Masculinity has the privilege of taking the question, 'what is non-violence,' as if it is a statement, so I am here to stand up and answer, 'what is non-violence' with the question's full glory. Through reforming power based sexual experiences into pleasure based experiences, sexual violent masculinity will shift into communicative men.

III

Imagine

Going to your big office building,

With Shiny Glass windows - everything is glass. the building: Glass, the chairs: Glass, the coffee mugs: Glass, the toilets: Glass.

Everywhere you look you see your terrified face, but you have long resigned to your inevitable doom. You have only worked at BIGMONEYCOMPANY for three months, but getting this raise is everything to you. You walk past the front desk(made of glass), and press up on the elevator. Three other people get on with you. They're all wearing grey, wool trench coats. There is someone in the elevator pressing buttons. The three trench coats ask for floors 17, 139, and 63. You ask to see THEBOSS. When you ask this, the elevator worker pushes every button available, and a key hole and a cello pop out. They enter the key and a final golden button appears that says, 'THEBOSS'. After floor 139, the elevator worker starts playing long, held out notes on the cello (made of glass). Funeral reminiscent. The elevator stops. The doors start opening incredibly slowly. The cello plays louder. The door is a few inches open. You can see a red carpet leading down a vast hallway. The door is open enough for you to slip out. Your anxiety beats louder than any cello, it propels your footsteps. You start walking down the red carpet. The walls are covered with red carpet too. And the ceiling. There is no glass on this floor. You cannot see all the way down the hallway. For all you know, it could go on forever. As you walk, your talking points circle in your head; 'Hello Mr— Mrs?' You don't know their name. 'How are you? I wanted to meet today-' You wonder if that is too brash. Maybe you could lie. Say you have worked at BIGMONEYCOMPANY for over two years. No. They will know. You can see flashing lights at the end of the hallway. It looks like a carnival. There are double doors surrounded by big yellow lights, blinking in unison. The door is the most bizarre thing you have ever seen. It's gumballs. Red, Blue, Pink, Green, Purple, Orange, Yellow. The handle is made of gumballs too. You start counting how many feet you have left until you arrive at the door. 40 feet. 30 feet. 20 feet. You start to wonder if you remembered to brush your teeth that day. Or if you put deodorant on. You knock on the door 4 times. The first knock was really limp. The second and third were okay. You

wonder if the fourth was too violent or if four is too many times. The gumball door wooshes open. A bellhop stands behind it in a red and gold uniform, holding the door open. You step into a triangle shaped room. There are 8 different gumball machines lined up on the left side of the room, each separated by colour. The first 7 are Red, Blue, Green, Purple, Pink, Orange, Yellow. The 8th machine holds gummy bears. You notice that the walls and floor have two layers of glass, holding water in between. Abstract shapes swirl around, reflecting through the glass and onto a cement desk in the center of the room. The desk has been spray painted with various tags in various colours. There is a boy sitting on it. You think it's a boy, at least. He looks around 17. 18, maybe? He sits cross legged, wearing black ski pants and a black bandana around his neck. You notice he has no shirt on. He has curly orange hair. It looks like he has eyeliner on too. The most apparent thing to you, is that he is chewing bright pink gum. You are unsure how to react. You listen to him blow a bubble. POP. "Would you like some bubble gum?" he offers, "Pink is strawberry, you know." He sets a quarter on the desk. "Excuse me, but, do you work here?" He seems to not have heard you. He just stares at the gumball machines. You're uncomfortable by his silence. He seems to have forgotten you were there. A minute passes. He sits completely still on the table like a vintage fortune telling machine. You decide to call him Zoltar. Only the pool-like reflections move, even the bellhop is static. The only noise is from Zoltar chewing his gum and your breath. You feel like you're the only person in the room. After another minute you pick up the quarter Zoltar left on the desk. You go over to the gumball machines on the left side of the room. The closest one to you has Red gumballs in it. You walk by them sequentially, Letting your hand touch the glass on each machine as you pass. Blue, Green, Purple, then, at Pink, you pause. This container looks emptier than the others. You let your hand reach out to place your quarter, and watch as your hand turns the handle. As you do this, you realize that quarter was never just a quarter. The Pink gumball

really does taste like strawberry. As you leave, your back reflects in the glass, and you realize that you never did get that pay raise.

IV

My first conscious experience with masculinity came long before my first experience with gumballs. I was at an all-boys school In eighth grade when I first started working out. I determined I was going to get visible abs which motivated me to workout everyday, doing pull ups and crunches.

At the time, even though I would never admit it, I worked out because I wanted sexual attention. I had consumed enough media to view men with abs as more superior and more masculine, making them ideal candidates for sexual attention. I had witnessed peers around me at school be idolized because of relationships they had with girls, and I craved that glamour. Sexual attention to me was a bridge to popularity within my all boys class. It's not like I wanted attention from girls, rather I wanted validation from my masculine relationships. My inexperience showed in my workouts through poor form, but nevertheless got a feeling of progress out of them. I felt progressed in that I was gaining an edge over my classmates. I was becoming more masculine than them, more powerful. I felt like I was racing against the idea of being man enough. I felt like if I wasn't in first place, I was in last. I felt like there is only one way to be masculine: there is correct and there is weak.

My first conscious memory with gumballs was in Minnesota over the Fourth of July when I was spending time with my extended family. Two of my cousins made a bet over water skiing, Ryan waging 100 dollars, and Burke 10. The rules were simple; whoever water skied longer was the winner. Burke took a substantial amount of convincing to agree to this bet, but once he did,

Ryan's excitement of winning was apparent. Throughout the day, I had been talking about a gumball closet, which is literally a closet filled with gumballs so when someone opens the door they all spill out. Burke was overtly amused with this idea, and decided that if he won he would give me the 100 dollars to spend on gumballs. And he won. Ryan lasted about 30 seconds on the water skis, then Venmoed the 100 dollars to me. I bought 1700 Dubble Bubble gumballs. These gumballs are more than candy. These gumballs are manifestations of dreams. I have been empowered through turning a desire into a palpable bathtub of gumballs. I have been empowered to bring 1700 gumballs to my new school because joy is empowering. I have been empowered to create a gumball stop sign, and when portfolio day came around I did not contain my excitement. I proudly had the stop sign as my first piece in my portfolio and proudly pointed out where it was displayed on the Oxbow campus. I have the choice of empowerment over seeking power. I now work out because I enjoy it. I have fun playing music in my garage, and I have fun dancing in my mirror. I create this bubble gum mosaic to offer masculinity a choice between Empowerment and Power.

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