

Derek Stoops

Project proposal – “Earth Beneath”

“Arts generally considered inferior or commercial now perform functions similar to those of monumental arts of previous cultures. Today the artists of popular culture, like medieval craftsmen, fashion images to communicate the beliefs that define our world. Like those revered stained glass windows or carved statuary of earlier times, the elusive representations of TV depict a mythological framework for contemporary individual and collective life, the American Way.” -Gregor T. Goethals

I want to create an installation that calls attention to what can be culled from the litany of *memento mori* expressions on broadcast news television as presented in a structure that explores the presumably segregated relationship between media, religion and the viewer. The structure of the installation will consist of seven 19” color televisions placed face down in the middle of an dimly lit long corridor with the power, audio and video lines running from the back of the TVs to alternating side walls close to the ceiling. The entrance to the piece will be controlled by a light trap door opening to either side of the two pathways that wrap around the row of evenly spaced out TVs on the floor. The talking heads on the screens present the news. They repeat the various key words as they are intermittently cut into with the talking heads and dialog of televangelists. The layout of the room will be such that you cannot see the screens without lowering yourself to the floor.

“Death, murder, died, suffocated, crash, stabbed, shot, slain, impaled, crushed, poisoned, kill and diseased” are just a few of the key words that the news media assails us with on a daily basis. Individually, they may not seem intimidating, but amplified in quantity and frequency the words take on an even stronger oppressive glossolalic quality. Injected into the deluge of *memento mori* expressions will be words, ‘worship’ and ‘sin’ delivered by broadcasted televangelists cut into the mix in the same fast montage style. Besides the religious key phrases, the number of televisions is also an important formal element of the installation. The seven heavenly virtues and deadly sins are in common use by many religions as a way of codifying the correct way of living and dying to its followers.

A hint of potential conflict comes when an onlooker tries to see what is on the television screen. Due to the size and rounded nature of the 19” CRT, when the TV’s are placed face down on a slightly reflective floor such as polished concrete, rapidly changing colors given off by the screens are reflected onto the surrounding white walls. This allows the viewer to not only see that an image is being played on the

screen, but that if one should kneel down, a large portion of the image on the screen will be visually accessible. A religiously aware viewer will understand that if he or she chooses to kneel down in order to access the image a question of the intent and influence arises especially if he/she has noted the title of the piece, "Earth Beneath" as the title is lifted directly from the second of the Ten Commandments of the Hebrew Scriptures. For the more secular viewer, the title takes on more of a structural reference. Electronic broadcast media (with its contemporary social framework) and religious practice (with its historic social framework) share in a purpose: the guidance of the individual by the fashioning of both verbal and non-verbal imagery for the purpose of communicating how we define our world.

Is seeking this image an act of idolizing in any way or is it just another source of information with no conflicting insert? Is seeking the visual component the same as making a choice about which influence to accept? The questions I propose to the viewer originate in the questioning of intent and influence, both externally via the media and religion and internally by making a choice about how much of an influence to accept.