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EAGERLY PATIENT

Erin Elizabeth

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Are banal and routine experiences in life less important or memory-worthy than celebratory moments that require preparation and planning, the anticipation of which is akin to emotional foreplay? What is the purpose of celebration? Is it empty, bound to disappoint, or is it ritualistic punctuation of the mundane, providing balance for the sublimity of suffering? These questions are addressed in the thesis exhibition, *Eagerly Patient*. The exhibition includes carriers of celebration such as cake, confetti, banners, and gifts in an attempt to understand the paradoxical hierarchy of experiential value.

EAGERLY PATIENT

ERIN ELIZABETH

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

School of Art

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2014

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EAGERLY PATIENT

ERIN ELIZABETH

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CHAPTER I

EAGERLY PATIENT: EXPLORING CELEBRATION

“However, one must not think slightingly of the paradoxical; for the paradox is the source of the thinker’s passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. But the highest pitch of every passion is always to will its own downfall; and so it is also the supreme passion of the Reason to seek a collision, though this collision must in one way or another prove its undoing. The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought itself cannot think.”¹

The anticipation of an experience can often be more fulfilling than the experience itself. There is an ambiguous chasm that exists between anticipation and experience in which all outcomes are possible. The possibility of infinite potential is fleeting, often ending in disappointment, if not because the lived experience falls short of anticipation, then simply because the moment has passed, now the property of memory, never to live again.

It can be difficult to pinpoint the transition from anticipation to lived reality. There is always something to anticipate, whether celebratory or sad, resulting in nearly continuous emotional foreplay. Nailing down the death of the experience is easier in moments of celebration. Many rites-of-passage are celebrated or commemorated with an event, usually involving family, friends, and food. These events can be magnified or hindered by past experiences of

¹ Søren Kierkegaard and Johannes Climacus, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 46.

elation or disappointment; from a socially traumatizing childhood birthday memory to the absence of a deceased loved one.

There is a great deal of physical preparation involved in commemorative events, and the reality of how an event transpires can never live up to the utopic daydreams of one drunk with anticipation. Even if the event is perfect in every detail, it still passes and the experience dies. When is the emotional climax? How can the stamina be mustered to engage in the process all over again? There are few tangible reminders of the transition from anticipation to experience. The thesis exhibition, *Eagerly Patient*, utilizes carriers of celebration as case studies in an attempt to bridge the gap between anticipation and experience and to uncover how objects and experiences gain value.

CHAPTER II

CELEBRATION: FRIVOLITY OR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?

What is the social and emotional significance of celebration? Do objects strictly associated with celebration have more symbolic and ritualistic value than the banal? If enlightenment or *nirvana* is *supermundane*, and for the most part, devoid of emotional variation, what is the purpose of elevating emotional experiences through celebration?² Where does anticipatory experience rank on the emotional hierarchy? These are some of the questions addressed by the work in *Eagerly Patient*. Through carriers of celebration, the exhibition explores how different kinds of experiences and emotions relate to one another and the significance of such relationships. Despair and ecstasy are on opposite ends of the emotional spectrum yet they are intimately linked. The anticipation of celebration, much like foreplay, lasts longer than the climax; *Eagerly Patient* pays homage to that in-between space, the desire to prolong anticipation and the experience of hope by highlighting the inevitability of conclusion.

The construction of experiential value (as opposed to use or exchange value) is paradoxical; there is often a contradiction between how one feels and

² His Holiness Tenzin Gyatsho The XIVth Dalai Lama of Tibet, *The Opening of the Wisdom-Eye* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), 51.

how one is supposed to feel, or how one thinks one should feel. The time leading up to a celebration is the living embodiment of Schrödinger's famous thought experiment; one can never know how an event will play out.³ Before any given celebration, the event is disappointing *and* fulfills one's anticipatory fantasies.

There are many symbolic cues indicating celebration: cake, confetti, banners, and gifts, although, even if all those factors are present, without loved ones as witnesses, celebration is empty. So what is the purpose of engaging in celebration if meaningful and memorable social interaction is the true purpose of such events? Perhaps the coded yet frivolous language of celebration is what allows participants to engage in significant social bonding in order to create lasting emotional ties and maintain or cultivate emotional health. *Eagerly Patient* juxtaposes commercial value, social ritual, and sentimentality, embracing consumer culture while simultaneously rejecting it in favor of finding more authentic meaning in an attempt to reconcile a paradoxical value system.

³ Erwin Schrödinger posed a thought experiment in November 1935: "A cat is penned up in a steel chamber, along with the following diabolical device (which must be secured against direct interference by the cat): in a Geiger counter there is a tiny bit of radioactive substance, so small, that *perhaps* in the course of one hour one of the atoms decays, but also, with equal probability, perhaps none; if it happens, the counter tube discharges and through a small relay releases a hammer which shatters a small flask of hydrocyanic acid. If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives *if* meanwhile no atom has decayed. The first atomic decay would have poisoned it...The cat's destiny would remain unresolved until the box was opened and someone looked inside, determining the state of the cat. But until it was viewed, the cat would remain 50% alive and 50% dead." (Bancroft, 8).

CHAPTER III

CONFECTIONS: LYNCHPINS OF SOCIAL RITUAL

Cake has a long and symbolic history that has reached every corner of the earth. Nearly every civilization throughout history has had some kind of sweet confection that was consumed socially to mark celebration. The more ritualized the consumption, the more important the rite of passage it celebrated.⁴ Celebration in contemporary Western society places huge importance not only on the presence of cake, but also on its appearance. The cake is always the centerpiece of festivities, although often accompanied by other confections such as candy. Even a child understands that cakes are to be admired and not touched or consumed until the candles are blown out and/or the honoree cuts into the cake (although the temptation to sneak some icing with one's finger is ever-present). Once the cake-presenting and cake-cutting rituals are completed, it is distributed and eaten together, a symbol that the party has reached its climax. The accompanying confections are a self-serve precursor to the communal ingestion, providing flavorful foreplay for guests in need of more immediate gratification.

For all the ritual importance of cakes, they are by nature ephemeral. Their ultimate purpose is to be consumed (and thus destroyed) and yet they are

⁴ Nicola Humble, *Cake: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2010), 11.

laborious endeavors, themed, ornately decorated, and bearing messages of good will. The only instance of cake being saved beyond the initial celebration is in the common Western tradition of freezing the top tier of a wedding cake for the couple to enjoy on their first anniversary. Even in that case, the cake is ingested; the consumption allows the memory of the original event and the social bonds the event created to resurface for consideration. Any way it's sliced, cake is temporary, to be admired and consumed. Like the experience of celebration, it cannot be saved or preserved in a tangible form. The transitory nature of cake mirrors that of celebration itself.

Cake and candy are represented in several works in *Eagerly Patient*. All of the pieces speak to the ritual function of cake and the candy is included in

an effort to cement celebratory associations and the possible emptiness or overly sweet emotional experience celebration carries. All the confection pieces attempt to arrest the moment before or just after consumption, when the anticipation of consuming is very much alive. That anticipation cannot last forever and if one attempts to prolong it (as in *Eagerly Patient*), the result is spoiled.

Much like the anticipation of a festive event is

doomed to end, perhaps in satisfaction and perhaps not, the confections are doomed to be eaten or else spoil. Perhaps the consumption brings satisfaction

Figure 1: *Taste the Rainbow 1*, skittles, nerds, and m&m's on paper, 14" x 11", 2013

but maybe the cake tastes too much of food coloring. Or possibly too many confections are eaten and the result is a sour stomach. The guest/eater is often left wanting more, and consuming the confections does not adequately satisfy the emotional anticipation of staring and salivating.

On Reading Between the Lines, one of the confection pieces featured in *Eagerly Patient*, is both a sculpture and an actual cake, ordered from a commercial bakery. The piece flirts with Duchamp's definition of the readymade as published in Breton and Eluard's *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*: "an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of the artist."⁵ Considering *Eagerly Patient* to be a staging of a celebration, containing elements of a party without actually being one, viewers engage with *On Reading Between the Lines* in the same way party guests engage with a centerpiece cake. Ideally, the viewers wonder if the cake is real, and through visual inspection come to the conclusion that it is in fact a real cake...so why is it the centerpiece of the exhibition rather than situated with the other food just outside the gallery? It calls into question what constitutes art and how an object is transformed when given a title and inserted into a gallery environment. Thomas Deane Tucker explains this phenomena using Duchamp's *In Advance of a Broken Arm* as an example:

"He made no pretense of having made it, yet still considered his choosing and naming it a creative act. To make a readymade is an act of designation as opposed to creation. It

⁵ Thomas Deane Tucker, *Derridada: Duchamp as Readymade Deconstruction* (Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2009), 45.

is through language that the ordinary shovel is designated a 'replica' of itself and elevated to the higher status of art. In this designatory act, language retains its proper function as the conveyer of meaning, but generates meaning through *différance* rather than through reference or association with the show shovel as an object. The show shovel is ripped from its everyday context and the inscription comes to the snow shovel already fragmented and displaced from its original reference in language. *Différance* is put into play when Duchamp chooses the snow shovel, a choice saturated by indifference and put to work through the act of inscription. As a readymade *In Advance of a Broken Arm* is a *différant* snow shovel but "in *différance*, *both* repeated in its economy and radically altered." It thus fulfills Duchamp's desire to create a work of art that is not a work of art."⁶

On Reading Between the Lines uses a similar strategy as Duchamp's *In Advance of a Broken Arm* to convey meaning to the viewer. The cake is only considered art through the designation of the artist and its placement. Although residing in a gallery setting, *On Reading Between the Lines* cannot be separated from its true nature, that of an ordinary celebration cake. The only way the piece could be differentiated from other bakery cakes is its atypical message. *On Reading Between the Lines* is emblazoned with the phrase: "too old to fuck around and too young to die."⁷ The message may at first seem biting or pessimistic, however, it closely resembles the subtext of most celebrations. The purpose of celebration is to announce the fulfillment of a rite-of-passage or mark the passage of time; both bring increased responsibility to the honoree. Although the emotional temperature of celebration is nearly always jovial, they are, in essence, paying homage to the fact that time is

⁶ Tucker, *Derrida: Duchamp as Readymade Deconstruction*, 45-46.

⁷ Murder By Death. "Boy Decide." *In Bocca al Lupo*. Tent Show Records, 2006.

marching forward and cannot be stopped or frozen. The honoree must accept the new challenges that face him or her, forsaking small amounts of freedom, one party at a time.

Also included in *Eagerly Patient* are prints from the *Let them Eat Cake* series, which attempt to freeze the ultimately fleeting moment of cake consumption. Cakes, cupcakes, and frosting are smashed onto sheets of paper creating a matrix, other sheets of paper are then laid on top of it in order to create transfer prints. The food coloring from the frosting stains the paper and the oil and butter slowly seep out, creating a halo around the pigmented areas. The frosting colors are not those chosen by a home cook, instead they speak to commercial bakeries and market research. Homemade cake has a different connotation than purchased cake; therefore, colors indicative of consumer culture and store-bought cupcakes are used in the prints to isolate their interpretation toward an exploration of generic commercialized celebration.

Confections that started out as saliva-inducing and delectable sources of emotional expectation are transformed into something grotesque and rotting,

Figure 2: *Untitled (Blue Cupcake 1)*, frosting and graphite on paper, 14" x 11", 2013

Figure 3: *Mandala 2*, frosting and sprinkles on paper, 40" x 28", 2013

all by the simple act of trying to visually preserve the moment, trying to save something that cannot be saved. The value of cake is in the communal consumption. That possibility is removed with the prints. The cakes become garbage. The slowly decaying stains on the paper are all that's left of their former decadence. By negating cake's primary function, it loses its ritual and symbolic value; it becomes a simulacrum.

The image destroys the possibility of cake

fulfilling its function as the transition from anticipation to experience.

Baudrillard wrote about images that stand in for symbolic meaning:

"Thus perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity. To this murderous capacity is opposed the dialectical capacity of representations as a visible and intelligible mediation of the Real. All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could *exchange* for meaning, and that something could guarantee this exchange-God, of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum-not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference."⁸

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, "Precession of Simulacra," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 461.

Do the prints preserve the ritual integrity of cake or destroy it as Baudrillard warns? If they can stand in for the social function, what is the point of the real cake, the celebration, and the communal ingestion? Rather than collapse the meaning of socially consumed confections do the works reinforce the gravity and symbolic function of cake, thus reminding viewers that no image could exchange for cake's celebratory presence, the experience of eating cake and the meaning associated with its consumption? The prints walk a dangerous line, exploring the potential socially isolating emotional pitfalls of representation.

CHAPTER IV

CONFETTI: CELEBRATION ORGASMS

The handmade confetti featured in *Eagerly Patient* is the most laborious undertaking in the exhibition. The confetti exists in several previous projects and is represented in the work titled *Break Glass in Case of Emergency*, in which confetti is displayed filling a deep shadow box frame. A gilded hammer hangs next to the frame to facilitate the title's implication. The remnants of the process, strips of gilded paper with the confetti shapes cut out, pile in a nest-like structure on the floor next to the frame. The mass of remnants is far larger than the confetti itself and calls into question the futility of the process as well as pointing out the handmade nature of the confetti.

The confetti is made from a series of mezzotint and relief prints that are silver or gold leafed and cut out using a variety of differently shaped craft punches. Although commercially produced tools are used in the piece, making confetti by hand in a repetitive and painstaking process confounds its meaning. Labor is one of the most important aspects of *Break Glass in Case of Emergency*. Time was spent with each of the hundreds of thousands of pieces, first printing them, then gilding them, and finally, punching out circle and star

shapes. Time and energy was devoted to making something that will ultimately become garbage, not only because of an interest in the futility of labor, but also to monumentalize anticipation and the ‘moment’: how quickly an object of celebration and beauty becomes a mess, banal, something to be cleaned up. Even though it is unlikely the confetti featured in *Break Glass in Case of Emergency* will be used, the confetti cannot be separated from its implied function. A great deal of emotional emphasis is put on experience but perhaps it is anticipation itself that is to be celebrated.

The painstaking printing process added value to the confetti through the investment of labor. The confetti is comprised of mezzotint and relief prints.

Mezzotint is an extremely labor-intensive process and contemporary printmakers who utilize the process can choose to

Figure 4: *Break Glass in Case of Emergency (detail)*, hand punched mezzotint prints, gold and silver leaf, variable dimensions, 2013

purchase pre-

mezzotinted plates. The mezzotint plate used to print the confetti on display was created by hand. Furthermore, each print is covered with either silver or gold leaf even though more remnant material is created than confetti. This act speaks not only to a waste of time but also a waste of money. In addition to

creating more labor through gilding, much gold and silver leaf automatically becomes garbage, even before the confetti is used. To further add to the ridiculous amount of labor that went into creating the piece, every one of the nearly million confetti pieces was punched by hand.

The blackness of the confetti is another important conceptual element, as celebration confetti is not generally black. The confetti is dark not only to highlight the gold and silver leaf, but also to tie in metaphors about dark matter. Although the universe seems like a dark, never-ending expanse of nothingness, stars and galaxies drifting further and further apart until one day descending into cold darkness, everything is actually held together by darkness: dark matter.

Dark matter is an interesting metaphor for the human condition. More so than the everyday, more so than the ecstatic, darkness defines a person. The

Figure 5: *Break Glass in Case of Emergency (detail 2)*, hand punched mezzotint prints, gold and silver leaf, variable dimensions, 2013

worst events in a person's life are perhaps the most pivotal, whether one overcomes them or succumbs to them dictates the rest of one's life and

influences the perception of every future event. In the depths of despair, when

all seems dark, there is always sublimity at the other end. The rapture of being alive can be felt more intensely after deep suffering: the two emotions are at opposite ends of experience but increasing one only enhances the possibility for the other. This is why countless hours must be spent producing eventual 'garbage.' It is an in-between space and a place of existence that should arouse revelry but usually receives neglect.

CHAPTER V

BANNERS: SPELLING IT OUT

Banners are another important carrier of celebration used in an attempt to explore value through a case study of party symbols. A series of prints and subsequent works not displayed in *Eagerly Patient* serve as important precursors for *Greetings*. The initial series of prints feature letters that are

Figure 6: *On Critical Optimism*, collagraph, graphite, gold leaf, acrylic, and stickers on paper, 22" x 28", 2012

arranged to look like a banner one buys and hangs up for a birthday party or other kind of celebration along with stickers, gold and silver leaf, and drawn elements. The ultimate purpose of the prints is to create tension

between the interpretation of the text and the signification of its format.

The printed suite spilled over into a more direct exploration of the commercial implications of the banner format and actual banners were assembled from make-your-own-banner kits. The banners immediately read as celebratory because text in that format has few other connotations.

Celebration is the jumping off point for the viewer to think about the anticipation and preparation that go into such events and how the relationship between labor and

experience is quantified.

Some of the banners are

funny or slightly absurd

while others are

somewhat biting,

displaying pessimism in an optimistic format.

Figure 7: *Untitled (Banner)*, custom banner, 5" x 65", 2012

In addition to existing as actual banners, the phrases are also used in a subsequent series of prints. The letters are printed individually using a set of

commonly available alphabet stamps,

engaging in elements of formalism while

making use of commercially produced

materials. These works are similar to the

initial series of banner prints, appearing to be

illustrations or pictures of something that

Figure 8: *Untitled (This is Happening)*,
heat embossed relief print, 9" x 12", 2013

exist in reality (which they do, as banners) while also denoting celebration. In

an attempt to subvert the fact that the prints are works of art and infuse them back into the world of real world celebration paraphernalia, the prints were made into greeting cards and are featured in *Eagerly Patient* as the piece titled *Greetings*. The cards in *Greetings* are displayed on a spinning display unit, identical to those used in retail environments. This strategy situates the work in the same context as their real world counterparts, evoking a different kind of viewer response than a series of framed prints. In *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity*, Johanna Drucker investigates similar strategies, which she designates as “complicit formalism”:

“Why complicit? Because the work simultaneously disrupts the norm and makes use of its situatedness. The piece is integrated with the systems to which it calls attention....Complicity is neither salvific or nihilistic; its transformations do not prescribe the consequences that might follow from the aesthetic experience works of art provide, even as it suggests the many routes of entangled and embedded provocation to which their artfulness gives rise.”⁹

The use of commercial printing, standard greeting card format, and retail display unit in *Greetings* disrupts the piece’s artfulness while the location of the work in a gallery reinforces it. The display format and commerciality of the cards invites interaction

Figure 9: *Greetings*, custom greeting cards, 5" x 7" each, 2013

⁹ Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 69.

and possibly confusion, as the viewer decide whether or not they can handle or take the cards. It also invites the viewer to think about the occasion to which the banner might be referring. Perhaps viewers can envision the perfect recipient for each sentiment, even if it is not a card they would send. The use of retail display conventions inserts the work into the commercial setting that inspired it. *Greetings* represents a multi-faceted circuit of simulacra, starting as banners, then fine art prints, then commercial reproductions of prints displayed in a commercial fashion. The greeting cards represent banners as well as being greeting cards and thus encapsulate several symbols of celebration.

One of the messages in *Greetings* is also the main feature of a

Figure 10: *On Accessibility (detail)*, QR code, variable dimensions, 2014

website, displayed in *Eagerly Patient* in the form of a framed QR code in a piece titled *On Accessibility*. An actual celebration banner is only visible, and its message only discernable to the party guests. The greeting card format expands the potential audience, but

viewership is still limited in a tangible way. A

photograph of the ‘this is happening’ banner is

displayed on the website, www.isthishappening.org, and is potentially viewable to everyone and anyone who has access to the Internet and is aware of the site. However, information always has channels of access and consistently

throughout civilization, knowledge has been a privilege of the wealthy. A viewer with a smart phone and a QR code reader will easily and immediately have access to the website. Without these tools, the work becomes impotent, a commentary on the commercial nature of the QR code and the privilege of knowledge. The QR code is displayed in an ornate gilded frame signifying the importance of the information that it contains, information that upon access may prove to be useless or self-evident to the point of futility. The phrase 'this is happening' is self-referential, it describes a larger state of being as well as each passing moment, a reminder to viewers, much like the confection works, that time will always move forward, relentlessly and despite emotions.

CHAPTER VI

GIFTS: STRINGS ATTACHED

The final symbols of celebration explored in *Eagerly Patient* are gifts. Gifts are present at most rite-of-passage celebrations. They represent a social contract and the process of gift giving informs social hierarchies¹⁰. There is no such thing as a free gift; they always come with a price and the implied promise of reciprocation. Despite the complex social system of gift giving, it is still seen as a positive act of celebration. In *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Marcel Mauss points out how the complexity of the gift-giving tradition is still at play in contemporary society, “A considerable part of our morality and our lives themselves are still permeated with this same atmosphere of the gift, where obligation and liberty intermingle.”¹¹

There is a lot of anticipation when giving and receiving gifts. On the giver’s part, it is the anticipation of seeing the excitement or gratitude on the face of the recipient. The emotions of the receiver vary greatly depending on age. For a child, the feeling is of overwhelming excitement, anticipating the contents of the package, believing it could contain the child’s most coveted wish, something that could fulfill the child’s wildest dreams. As the child gets

¹⁰ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

¹¹ Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, 65.

older the hope fades with the knowledge that no package will contain anything life altering. The adult recipient is generally aware of the financial constraints of the giver and expectations are gauged by that knowledge. Adults also anticipate their own reciprocation, especially if a gift is unexpected. An interest in the presentation of the packages also develops, something children care little about. In addition to appreciating the sophistication of the wrapping, the adult recipient also laments the waste that goes into such trappings, knowing the beautiful paper, ribbon, and other packaging will end up as garbage. It is an interesting mix of concern for the giver's time spent wrapping, monetary value of the packaging, and environmental impact of a largely unnecessary practice. Occasionally, the wrapping is indicative of a larger time and financial commitment than the contents of the package itself. Is the practice of gift-wrapping simply to extend emotional anticipation? Perhaps that is what inspires people in celebratory circumstances not to open gifts right away. Similar to cake, gifts are admired and considered before their delicate paper is ravaged. The delayed satisfaction is akin to extended foreplay and can ultimately enhance or distract from the actual climax.

This Is It consists of gifts stacked into a stupa-like formation. Stupas are ancient architectural forms reserved for spiritual worship and adopted by Buddhists. Placing the gifts in such a form calls into question the social importance of giving and receiving gifts. The viewers have to navigate the large form, which takes up a substantial portion of the exhibition and is situated in

the narrowest part of the gallery, forcing viewers to move carefully around it. Frosting acts as mortar and holds the stacks of carefully wrapped gifts together. This questions ideas of permanence as well as bombards the viewer with an overly sweet smell. Although the frosting references mortar, suggesting a permanent architectural structure, or something that is meant to last, the oil from the frosting corrupts the paper, making it soggy and decaying the structure underneath, eventually causing the form to collapse or rot from within.

The gifts are wrapped in brightly colored papers and carefully tied with bows. The colors relate to the frosting colors used in the *Let Them Eat Cake* series as well as to the base of the sculpture, which is covered in rainbow nonpareil sprinkles. The sprinkles make *This Is It* a hybrid of sorts, part confection and part gift. It is unclear if the packages contain anything but it is clear that the contents will never be revealed. The base is not wrapped, cannot be opened, and contains nothing. The emptiness of the base and purely decorative nature of the sprinkles draws attention to the sometimes empty or obligatory gesture of gift giving and the futile practice of wrapping gifts. This may result in apathy, increased curiosity, or both. The objective of *This Is It* is to create conflicting emotional states in the viewer.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: COMMERCIAL OBJECTS AND THE GALLERY

All of the works in *Eagerly Patient* have real world counterparts or are created with real world objects, which have designated functions in social ritual. For this reason, it is imperative that the works are isolated from the ‘real world’ and placed in a gallery context. Without the clinical environment of the gallery, the works run the risk of slipping into the functional role of their real world equivalents. The works are not necessarily readymades, but they are inspired by Duchamp and rely heavily on commercial fabrication processes. Although not indistinguishable from their real world counterparts like readymades, the works in *Eagerly Patient* follow the four conditions set by Thierry de Duve as to what constitutes art and how a readymade is perceived as art. According to de Duve a work must have: “(1) an object, (2) an author, (3) a public, and (4) an institutional place ready to record this object, to attribute an author to it, and to communicate it to the public, the entity this formation calls work of art is possible, *a priori*.”¹²

¹² Thierry du Duve, “Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism,” in *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Round Table*, ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 102.

The pieces in *Eagerly Patient* function in a similar manner as readymades, the processes and materials used are the same as their real world counterparts and viewers are familiar with their traditional contexts. However, the messages in the work, and the display conventions used cement the pieces in *Eagerly Patient* as Art. The sterile environment of the gallery provides the lens through which the work is viewed and creates the necessary framework for its interpretation. Common objects in a gallery setting can be viewed with more discernment and critical attention than objects existing in the world or ‘guerilla’ style artwork that is viewed outside the gallery without announcing itself as art. In *Studio and Cube*, using Rauchenberg’s *Bed* (1955) as an example, Brian O’Doherty explains the powerful impact of representing a common object in a gallery setting:

“Another is the bed. Like the studio it is soaked with the personal; even when empty it crawls with imprints and residues of identity. It puts on the same horizontal plane the tortures of sex and the ecstasy of dying. The bed is the nocturnal baseline of our vertical endeavors. It seems to exert an extra gravitational pull. Heavy with sleep, we are weighed down into some archaeology of memory and forgetfulness until we are made weightless by dreams or exploded by nightmares. The act of raising this horizontal familiar, like Lazarus, from its prone position to the vertical lets loose on it, in a violent rush, the powerful aesthetic conventions of looking at a picture on a wall.”¹³

Whether a common object is reproduced in a gallery setting or simply represented in two dimensions, the connotation of the object is magnified by

¹³ Brian O’Doherty, *Studio and Cube: On the Relationship Between Where Art is Made and Where Art is Displayed* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 17.

its location. Similarly to Rauchenberg's *Bed*, the works in *Eagerly Patient* call upon a viewer's private experience with an object and teeter between being 'it' and 'not it'. They represent something that they are not while also embodying what they represent. Cultural symbols are borrowed and repurposed, both embracing the consumer culture that fosters the commercialization of celebration and rejecting it. When symbols such as celebration banners, cakes, confetti, and gifts are removed from the 'real' world and placed in a gallery setting, they are transformed. The combination of the projects or each on its own inspire the viewer to think about the way life is experienced and understand that paradox is always present. As Kierkegaard wrote, "But the highest pitch of every passion is always to will its own downfall; and so it is also the supreme passion of the Reason to seek a collision, though this collision must in one way or another prove its undoing." Such is the case with *Eagerly Patient*; it represents that which lives to die.

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