

MORE REAL: Truths and Lies

Bertrand Lavier, *Walt Disney Productions*

LIE

As a teenager, Walt Disney dropped out of high school to enlist in the US army for WWI. He was rejected for being too young, but he and a friend were accepted by the Red Cross to be ambulance drivers. Walt was sent to France in 1918, after the war's official end. He spent just under a year in and around Paris. Having loved art of all kinds from a very young age (though not finding much during his childhood in Marceline, Missouri) Disney frequented many galleries, including the gallery founded by [Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler](#), the man credited with being one of Pablo Picasso's earliest champions.

Upon returning to the states in 1919, Disney worked at a Chicago factory in which his father owned stock while trying to figure out how to pursue a career in art. Disney attempted many things including several that would lead to his long and successful career, including comic strips for local newspapers, political cartoons, and one voice-acting role in a radio advertisement for the bank at which his brother worked. But at the same time he was experimenting with some of the more radical artist endeavors he'd seen in France. This included a series of sketches and model-size sculptures reminiscent of other modernist works of the time.

Artist Bertrand Lavier wondered what would have happened if Disney had followed that path instead of becoming a beloved cartoonist and animator. In his series, *Walt Disney Productions*, Lavier used Disney's own sketches and models to create an exhibit entirely of the cartoonist's invention. Looking at these works, Lavier has said: "You're in a parallel world."

TRUTH

Bertrand Lavier is interested in "the "very small translation" that transforms not-art into art." This particular work was inspired by a 1947 Disney cartoon in which Mickey takes Minnie on a visit to a museum filled with modern and abstract art. While visiting the gallery, Mickey intends to make fun of the different pieces, but Minnie ends up falling in love with everything. Lavier saw the cartoon and worked with a computer graphics creator who fabricated large scale, three-dimensional versions of these fictional works. He sought to create authentic reproductions of artwork that doesn't exist.

John Gerrard, *Infinite Freedom Exercise*

LIE

Dr. Meg Olmert is an alternative medicine based therapist working at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Her background is in animal based therapies. She pairs wounded service members with dogs so that they're comforted during tests and invasive procedures as well as PTSD treatment. After she viewed this piece, she was struck by the movements and how it reminded her of dance. She went on to start a program where she worked with wounded soldiers to re-contextualize and re-purpose these movements that were originally tied to fear and trauma. By reclaiming these actions, soldiers were able to reprogram their muscle memory so being startled would no longer trigger the fight or flight response. Her proudest moment was putting these movements together and with music. They performed a show last year at the Kennedy Center with the United States Navy Band.

TRUTH

The inspiration from this work came from a photograph in which an Iranian soldier watches a pair of oil refineries burning in Abadan, in southwest Iran. This work is derived from 3-D motion capture based on movements and drill procedures that they use to react to mortar fire in military exercises. The different poses that they take correspond to different types of explosions that they encounter by shielding their head or covering their ears. What's also interesting is that the background is rendered with incredible detail. The environment is actually rendered in real-time, so that if you were to look at this at different times during the day, the environment would be different.

Thomas Demand, *Presidency I*

LIE

After leaving the oval office, a president must become a citizen again. While they're still giving speeches and meeting with the occasional dignitary, they still need a place to work. President Clinton decided to open an office in Harlem in New York City, Jimmy Carter is fairly mobile with his Habitat for Humanity operations, but George W. Bush wanted something different. Working with his presidential library and Texas A&M University where it resides, they sponsored a design contest for his new office. This work was one of the entries. As a recreation of his former oval office, it was far more elaborate than many of the other entries in the contest which you can still view online at the presidential library website. Ultimately, this design was not chosen, but was given honorable mention. President Bush joked that spending 8 years in that office was 8 too many.

TRUTH

The series of photographs that you're looking at were commissioned by the *New York Times Magazine* for a series of articles about the 2008 presidential transition. The artist used repurposed materials for this work and upon closer examination you can tell that much of the environment is constructed from cardboard, confetti, and other ephemeral materials. The rug for instance is made completely out of confetti and is not an actual presidential rug, but was modeled after the one used in the television show, *The West Wing*. The "truth" of these images is supposed to convey the fleeting nature of political power; for instance, there are no stars on the American flag.

Iris Häussler, *Ellen Stanley's Bequest*

LIE

These works of art are by Ellen Stanley, who was stricken by an unidentified mental illness shortly after giving birth to a daughter in 1923. Stanley spent two years in an insane asylum before returning home and settling into a seemingly pointless but soothing routine: she filled her bathtub with clay, then dug holes in the soft material with her hands and filled the cavities with molten beeswax. Once hardened, the objects were excavated and displayed in her room. In order to maintain a continuous supply of wax, her family periodically removed and melted down the sculptures. At the time of Stanley's death in 1931, only five of her works remained. These, along with a conical wax sculpture that inspired her, make up the work called *Ellen's Stanley's Bequest*.

TRUTH

All of the works in this section were created by Ira Häussler who creates elaborate narratives to accompany her works of art in order to deepen the emotional experiences and connections people have with her work. So everything from the other story you heard was completely false. In past installations, Ira spent years developing a back story around a fake archaeological dig in Ontario, while in *ou topos* she may live for half a year in a house before transforming it into an art installation only to make up a story about it.

With most of her work, she doesn't mention its fictitious nature, and people often feel tricked. Canada's National Post ran the front-page headline, "Reclusive downtown artist a hoax." Novelist Martha Baillie summed up what many feel after viewing her work by saying, "She'd had no right to lie to me." Now, people are often let in on the story after an incident where most of the museum staff, even the docents giving the tours, were not in on the lie and had a mini-revolt when they found out.

Mark Dion, *Curator's Office*

LIE

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts has experienced several dramatic additions and renovations over the years. Kenzo Tange designed the first major addition in 1974 and Michael Graves designed the Target wing in 2006. The African galleries are currently undergoing a renovation so clearly a lot gets changed, boarded up, and transformed during these constructions. For instance, if you visit the offices of Contemporary Art, they recently discovered that one of the original walls of the museum had been bricked over. So now, if you look into their closet you can see an outdoor wall and window from the original 1915 museum wedged between two offices.

This office, recently uncovered, belonged to a curator from the 1950s who disappeared under mysterious circumstances. After the initial shock and surprise, it was decided to include it with the More Real exhibit given its fitting tone. The Decorative Arts curatorial department was more than happy to assist in providing analysis and textual didactics in order to make the office feel like one of the MIA's period rooms.

TRUTH

A problem posed by period rooms such as this one is that the contents in the room usually weren't found in the original room. They have been gathered and assembled to create the semblance of a room from a particular time period. This creates a false context for how one experiences the room and its objects. Many of the objects found in this room were taken from various offices throughout the MIA and reassembled by artist Mark Dion to create a fictional office. He has created a fake archaeological context so that you can experience the contents. Also, he and the museum want to trick you.

Dario Robleto, *The Melancholic Refuses to Surrender*

LIE

(Listen to this story for reference: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/489/no-coincidence-no-story?act=2#play>)

This pair of boxing gloves was inspired by a personal relationship that Robleto developed with his in-laws. Originally from Guatemala, Dario and his family immigrated to America when he was six years old. Prior to meeting his mother, his father had proposed to a different woman in Guatemala, who turned him down. His mother was not

concerned about this past love and wanted him to keep it behind him. When he was 14, Dario lost his father to leukemia.

While he was in college, he went on to meet his fiancée whose parents were also originally from Guatemala. During the night of their engagement, his mother and her parents joined them for dinner to celebrate. After dinner, they all went back to his place and started looking through old family picture albums to get to know each other more. Upon seeing a picture of his father, his fiancée's mother asked how Dario knew him. After sharing that it was his father, the fiancée's mother admitted that she had been proposed to by this man decades ago, but turned him down.

The truth was a traumatic realization for Robleto's mother. Mixed feelings of happiness and comfort also blended with distrust and loss. Robleto created these boxing gloves to serve as a metaphor. Normally, they offer protection to your hands, but when you know they're secret, that they're made out of hardened material, do they lose their powers of protection.

TRUTH

Robleto has developed a reputation for creating works of art out of unusual or found objects. Typically, in whatever he creates he tries to incorporate the essence of different items to invoke meditations on the ideas that he's trying to get across. He has employed dinosaur fossils, vinyl records, and even a ten-thousand-year-old flower caught in amber for use in his sculptures. For this pair of boxing gloves, which are in part inspired by a black boxer who was denied permission to board the Titanic (ironic luck), he included broken male hand bones in the materials that make up the object.

Ai Weiwei, *Colored Vases*

LIE

Ai Weiwei did in fact drop a Han dynasty urn and shatter it for a performance piece in 1995. It is also true that the sacrifice of an ancient work to create something new has been a question Ai has grappled with for most of his career.

Colored Vases is not however simply an extension of that project, but a completing of the circle Ai began in 1995. After the fervor that the destruction of the Han Dynasty urn caused, Ai was interested in what restoration of the objects would mean. In 2006 Ai was a speaker at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting, where he met Dr. Adrian Bowyer, a Senior Lecturer in mechanical engineering at the University of Bath in the

United Kingdom and the founder of RepRap, one of the first companies to bring 3-dimensional printing to a consumer market.

Ai began working with Bowyer and the RepRap 3D printer prototype (the printer would eventually be named "Darwin") to create replicas of ancient Chinese urns. Perhaps to differentiate these modern urns from their historic inspiration, or perhaps to draw attention away from the imperfections left by the printing process, Ai had the printer begin adding a layer of bright color to each urn.

To the ire of the Chinese government, Ai posted the designs for these urns on the RepRap website, so that anyone with a 3D printer could download the designs and "print" their own. When asked about the Color Vases' connection to his 1995 work, Ai explained that he wanted to restore what he had destroyed. "Now everyone can make their own history," he said.

TRUTH

One of Ai's most notorious acts is the 1995 performance in which he dropped a Han Dynasty urn onto a brick floor shattering it. The artist explained that he simply allowed the urn--a stand-in for Chinese history, tradition, and culture--to be grabbed by weight and gravity. The iconoclasm of the act is only slightly tempered by the knowledge that an old object was sacrificed in order to create a new one: Ai's performance.

In 2003 Ai began to expand on this theme with the series *Colored Vases*, which he made by dipping Neolithic clay bases in buckets of Japanese-made industrial household paint. When first confronted with these objects, one wonders whether the vases could possibly be real: has Ai actually painted over dozens of irreplaceable antiques? One is left to wonder about the status of Colored Vases--whether they are more desirable as ruined originals or enhanced fakes.