

# Sometimes A Cigar Is Just A Cigar

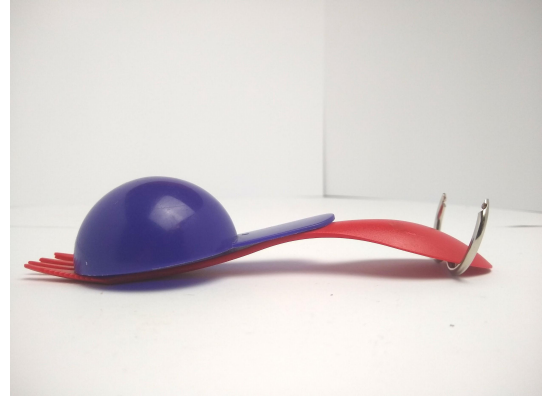
**This project explores ideas about how the human brain attempts to bring order to chaos by finding patterns and connections. Through use of household objects, cultural references and shared history I probe this process and what it means when we can't find connections.**

## Initial Response

My first thoughts on the project were that the idea of re-arrangement implies the change from one arrangement to another. When we take chaos and bring order to it, that is simply an arrangement. So for there to be a re-arrangement there must be an order to it before and afterwards but what if the order of something is not clear to the viewer? E.g. if a stack of books is in the order I read them, they will appear to the viewer to be without order.

Dividing the house into four areas - office, bedroom, kitchen and living room - I selected four objects from each. The only criteria for selection was that they had to have personal meaning to me. This gave me sixteen objects which had several implied orders, e.g. where in the house they came from, how long I'd had the objects etc - but no order or connections discernible to the viewer. I began photographing the objects, individually, in their groups of four and all together to simply document the objects<sup>1</sup>. During this process I became interested in how the objects combined to suggest something beyond the actual objects themselves. So I began deliberately

arranging the objects to amplify these ideas and expanding them to create scenes.



*Snail*



*Duck Lost In Desert*

## Reflection & Development

Looking at the images my mind was drawn to ideas of absurdism and surrealism. Particularly how arrangements without meaning can have their own aesthetics. As Comte de Lautréamont put it, "... as beautiful as the chance encounter of an umbrella and sewing machine on an operating table."

The surrealists used their work to explore the subconscious which was still a relatively new idea in the early part of the 20th century as both Freud and

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<sup>1</sup> See Sketchbook 29th Jan to 21st Feb and photos on Google Drive - <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IQ3iYyG2u3Rhhq2nKQERFxxzKFofHeUSRt?usp=sharing>

Jung rose to prominence. However in the century since then our understanding of human neurology and psychology has changed significantly. Exploring surrealist ideas of subconsciousness seemed out of date. I was interested in more modern ideas of how the brain fills in gaps or draws false connections. Researching this I stumbled on the work of the artist Barabara Bloom and a quote she used “A drink before and a cigarette after are the three best things in life.”

This quote, or more precisely the sensation of “getting it” when one’s brain fills in the gap in that sentence, pushed me in a new direction. I wanted to give the viewer something more than a surrealist collection of objects, no matter how beautiful that may be.

I started experimenting with incorporating text into the images to prompt the viewer. The image and the text were to provide two points where the viewer had to connect them in order “get” the idea. This combination of text and image is heavily used in internet memes. Such memes often remix (rearrange) cultural ideas and are often self-referential, both of which require the viewer to have an eclectic selection of knowledge to “get” the meme.

For example The “Drake No/Yes Meme” is one of the mostly widely used meme image of the last few years<sup>2</sup>. The example below uses the ubiquitous Drake format while simultaneously playing with the self-referential nature of memes.



Creating original meme templates

Creating a meme about meme templates in a meme template previously created

*Drake Meme, Artist Unknown*

By using the visual format of memes - generally square, with the text superimposed on the image (often using the Impact font) - I was able to create a variety of images. Some were very close take-offs of famous memes. Others were more abstract, playing with ideas of how one object can represent another based on their shapes (toilet rolls for the Twin Towers of the WTC) or colours (blue for a police officer).

## Final Presentation

Having a variety of images I decided to pick ten images for the final presentation. Nine of the images can be placed in three rough groups - cultural/art references, historic references and meme/internet references. They were chosen to be deliberately different so that no one person (other than myself) is likely to “get” all of them. I wanted each viewer to experience bafflement alongside the “aha” moments.

The tenth image was chosen because it has no references. It is simply an image I created during the project which tickled me. By placing a meaningless image within the context of other images I created an opportunity for viewers to create their own meaning for it. The image speaks the same visual language as the others and is clearly deliberately placed within the artwork so the viewer’s brain will automatically try to find order and reason for its presence.

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<sup>2</sup> Drake Meme - <https://en.meming.world/wiki/Drakeposting>

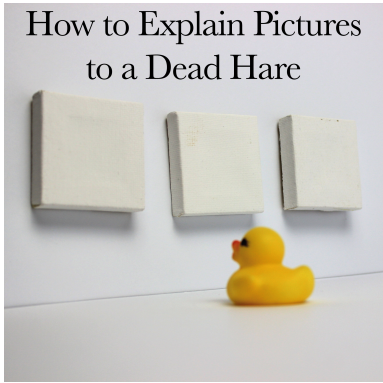


Each of the ten images is crudely glued to 5x5cm canvases. The size and shape mimics the way most viewers see memes on their phone while the crudity of the presentation speaks to the quick, cut & paste nature of meme creation. The use of miniature canvases to mount the image points to interplay between popular culture and art. Most recently how graffiti has moved from the street to the gallery but this is part of a broader history of clashes between popular culture and art establishments. This includes Pop Art but goes back much further to how artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec switched from painting traditional art scenes to what they saw in the streets around them.

From the start of this project, the idea of the square was present - four objects from each room, four

rooms, the square meme format etc. Choosing ten images, rather than a more conveniently square nine or sixteen images is a deliberate act. I wanted an “odd one out” which I could use to guide the viewer's eye. The final layout uses a hanging paragraph format, leading the viewer to start on the top left and scan left to right as if reading a book. This suggests to the viewer that the artist has given the arrangement meaning and that the order to the images carries an overarching message. Yet there isn't. The arrangement and order of the images has no meaning, it is just whimsy on my part. Just a cigar is sometimes just a cigar, art is sometimes just an act of frivolity.





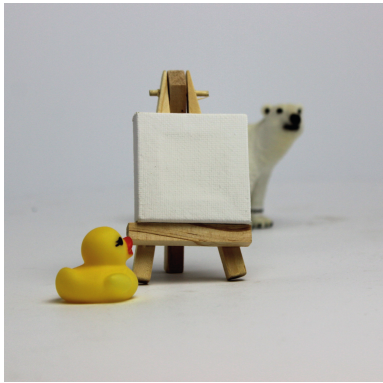
*Dead Hare*



*Sometimes ...*



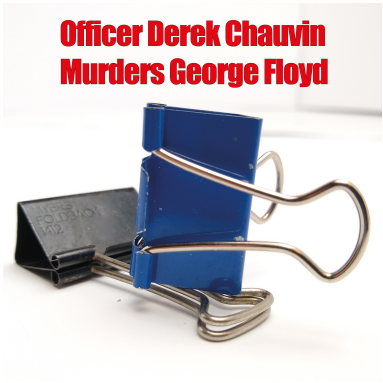
*9/11*



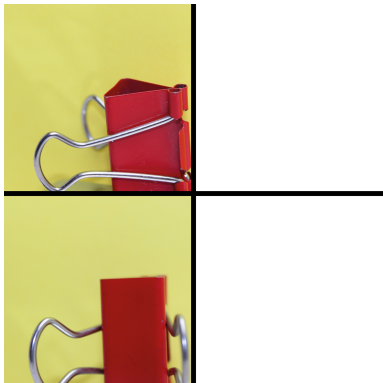
*Artist At Work*



*Slavery*



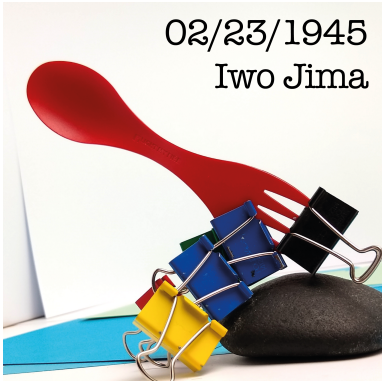
*Murder*



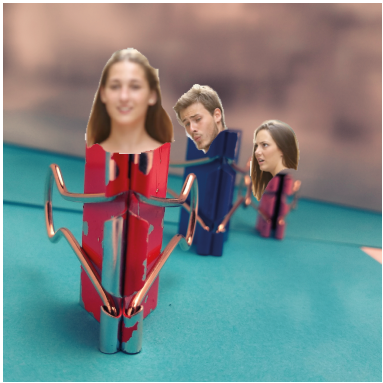
*Drake Meme*



*Pacman*



*Iwo Jima*



*Distracted Boyfriend*

