

August 16, 2021

RE: Review of Mr. Iker Bengoetxea Arruti's doctoral thesis "The

Ogrocadaver ~ In The Name of the Pseudonym"

To whom it may concern:

Foreward

I am pleased to review Mr. Iker Bengoetxea Arruti's doctoral thesis and portfolio of artworks presented to me in consideration of his Ph.D. defense at the Faculty of Graphics and Media Art at the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Fine Art and Design in Wroclaw. I first became aware of Mr. Arruti through his dossier, including his thesis and art reproductions submitted to me in June 2021. While I am new to Mr. Arruti's artwork I do have extensive experience with the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy in general and the Graphics and Media Art area in particular. Since 2009 I have been actively engaged with the faculty and students of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy while a

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Professor of Art at the University of Tennessee and then as the Director of the School of Art at Ball State University. I was a Visiting Artist at the Academy in April 2017 and a Visiting Professor in Drawing for the winter semester from October 1, 2018 - January 30, 2019. I am thoroughly aware of the mission of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy, the high quality of their students and faculty, and their rigorous commitment to learning and professional practice, and their connections to regional, national, and international institutions.

In addition to my activities in Poland I have extensive experience in China where I was the guest of 18 university and academies including notably the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing, the Sichuan Academy of Fine Art in Chongqing, Beihang University in Beijing, and Sichuan University in Chengdu where I held the position of Guest Professor. My work in both China and Poland encompassed academic exchange, exhibiting, teaching, lecturing, and curatorial work involving students, professors, and noted artists. I believe I am uniquely positioned to comment on Mr. Arruti's dissertation, artistic output, and potential.

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ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr. Arruti has a strong record of creative and professional achievements in printmaking, painting, graphic design, and music. He is an accomplished multi-dimensional artist. His CV amply documents his consistent participation in exhibitions, publications, and workshops. His record is indicative of an individual committed to creativity, outreach, and professional development. His range of artistic endeavors demonstrates that he is thoroughly engaged in the critical discourse of contemporary art, pedagogy, and professional practice. I note in particular his participation in over 20 exhibitions. These include solo exhibitions at he Non Gallery in San Sebastian, Basque Country, Spain; the Artezu Gallery in San Sebastian; and the Galeria U in Wroclaw, Poland. His work has been included in group exhibitions in Romania, Russia, Germany, Poland, Serbia, Italy, and Spain. His printmaking, illustration, painting, and music have been included in numerous publications and reviews.

ASSESSMENT OF PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT

Mr. Arruti has been consistently engaged in all aspects of artistic, scholarly, and pedagogical practice. His ability to conduct serious in depth scholarly research is clearly evidenced in his thesis. Additionally his studio practice in printmaking has been aided by intensive study and practice in the techniques of etching, screen-printing, and linocut. This is corroborated by the Collaboration Grant he received from the Foundation Bilbaoarte where he was both a studio assistant and resident artist. He also received a Specialized Studies Abroad Grant from the Basque Government's Department of Education to facilitate his professional and technical development. Additionally, he served for one academic year as a primary school teacher for extracurricular Art Education at the Amassorrain Public School in San Sebastian-Donostia, Spain. Mr. Arruti also took part in two workshops. He hosted a workshop in linocut at the Tabakalera International Centre for Contemporary Culture in Donostia-San Sebastian, Basque Country, Spain, and participated in a printmaking workshop in Falun, Sweden.

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Covid-19 at the Geppert Academy made it difficult to teach a regularly scheduled and structured class. However, Mr. Arruti was tasked to manage and maintain a printmaking studio and to assist students in their studio practice and production. I am told his presence, conscientious efforts, time, and expertise was of great value to the students in a difficult time. Given his research abilities, technical proficiency, strong communication skills, and knowledge of historical and contemporary approaches art issues and aesthetics I believe Mr. Arruti will be an outstanding artist/educator.

ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVE WORK AND Ph.D THESIS

In his thesis, "The Ogrocadaver ~ In The Name of the Pseudonym", Mr. Arruti presents a well researched, comprehensive, and fluid document that amply supports the conceptual, aesthetic, and technical approach to his artwork. While it is scholarly and descriptive it successfully goes beyond the objective realm of explanation and process and effectively immerses himself into the palimpsest of overlapping ideas and approaches to creativity.

Mr. Arruti is a multitalented artist adept in printmaking, painting, illustration, and music who for the purposes of this thesis has focused on printmaking, namely linocut. His thesis has allowed him the unique opportunity and time to step back and thoroughly analyze and research the efficacy and relevance of pseudonyms in historical and contemporary art through the examples of people like Voltaire, Barthes, Newton, Prince, and Bowie among many. He gets the opportunity in the role of a researcher to coherently flesh out, challenge, and establish his place in this dialogue. It is synthesis by analysis, a process of objectively describing ones process, ideas, and images as a means to raise questions and freely move forward into ones personal beliefs, concepts, and approaches. It may seem detached but it is actually a creative process used by Mr. Arruti in his thesis and artwork, and one he asks the viewer to use as well.

Mr. Arruti's strategy is conceal any knowledge of the artist thus eliminating preconceived notions about nationality, race, ethnicity, age, religion, personal style or any other factors implicit in a name. "The message or content of my work is anonymous". This "absence" negates the artist and challenges the viewer put the artwork above the artist. He creates pseudonyms often appearing

in the artwork as a “presence” for the viewer to unpack, decipher, and incorporate into their developing narrative. Initially the works means nothing, “absence”. The viewer creates “presence” through the techniques, symbols, images, concepts, and sources employed by the artist who shrouds himself in anonymity. The pseudonym creates a personal bond to the artwork for the artist and gives unique access to the artwork for the viewer. It is symbolic with connotations. It negates censorship and prejudgment. It is a “personal and private matter infused with magnetism.” The pseudonym becomes and “alter ego” allowing for “maximum flexibility.”

This reviewer doesn't feel the need to analyze or site specifics in the thesis. The thesis is well constructed, well conceived, thorough, and amply clarifies and supports the artist's arguments, citations, and aesthetic stance. It clearly shows that Mr. Arruti is firmly ensconced in the critical dialogue of contemporary art, philosophy, and criticism. He is through his thesis and artwork an active contributor. I admire his ability to consistently and relevantly insert his positions into the historical and descriptive narrative he presents. His research into the history and efficacy of pseudonyms (chapter one) is first rate. The descriptions of his chosen pseudonyms are extremely informative and revelatory. As an aside, I must say that I thoroughly

enjoyed the highly emblematic triangular construction of the name Ogrocadaver on the title page. It is an apt introduction to the tenor of his thesis through its graphic, visual, and phonic dynamics.

I regret that I have not seen his prints firsthand. However, his thorough descriptions (chapter three) of his processes and use of text, images, symbols, color, and mixed media afforded me a vivid idea of the physical and visual presence of each print suite. It effectively expresses the amount of research, reflection, surface development and image construction, and technique utilized. The prints present a unique equilibrium and spatial experience through the interaction of ethereal and graphic interactions and overlays. The artist affords the viewer a rich palimpsest of visual and intellectual information from which they can create their own experience and narrative.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Arruti's thesis demonstrates a very high level of competency and understanding of the project he proposed, researched, and ultimately realized in his thesis exhibition. His methodology was rigorous, comprehensive, and convincing. It is first-rate work,

intellectually sound, and clearly written. He was very successful in internalizing his research in a way that connects meaningfully to his aesthetic and artistic production. I am impressed with his commitment, work ethic, curiosity, and history of success. He is a multidimensional individual fully versed in the methods and history of printmaking and, importantly, an individual capable of assimilating and incorporating many sources and art forms. This flexibility and range of possibilities and approaches keeps him from becoming typecast and tied to specific expectations. I have no doubt that he will continue to be a productive artist and effective teacher. Following my analysis of his dissertation and creative output as well as his professional practice in the field of art, I highly recommend that he be awarded an academic Ph.D title in the Visual Arts.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas J. Riesing', with a stylized, flowing script.

Thomas J. Riesing

Professor, Painting and Drawing, School of Art, University of Tennessee (1973-2010)
Director, School of Art, Ball State University (2010-2015)
Visiting Professor, Drawing, Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Fine Art (2018-2019)