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### **Outcome Report: It's Dangerous to Go Alone! Take This!**

My initial proposal for the Miller Arts Scholars Award was an extended performance piece. As I wrote last year, the world is an almost comically dangerous place. Nuclear superpowers butt heads over diplomatic trifles. Closer to home, girls get snatched off the street at night and black college students get tackled by overzealous government officers. Danger is constantly imminent in a way that I find particularly fascinating and that is not commonly acknowledged. *It's Dangerous to Go Alone! Take This!* began its life as a response to this problem. My goal would be to build and carry a series of handmade shields, each essentially a portable art installation and also a symbolic reminder of the constant need to be on guard. The piece would be both parody and, in its sheer absurdity, a poignant reminder.

The initial timeline called for three phases. In the summer of 2015, I would work out the technical hitches with producing shields, and begin to develop a visual vocabulary borrowing equally from comic books and heraldic design (two sources of heroic role models). During the following school year, I would begin carrying the shields, adding prints and paint to them until early April, when I would display the results as my distinguished major's thesis in the studio art department.

All that said, no plan survives contact with the enemy. Almost as soon as I had started researching the project I began to question the efficacy and ethicality of such a project. The world already has too much propaganda, too many macho hero-types strutting around claiming to look danger straight in the eye. The whole project reeked of a certain artist as heroic genius quality that I could not stomach. Still, even though I found myself increasingly skeptical with traditional notions of heroism, I longed for some of those heroic ideals. This conflict became the ultimate subject of my work.

And that's where I took the project. Taking the visual design elements I had already discovered through my research for the shield project, I set out to produce a series of prints and

paintings questioning this impulse towards anachronistic notions of heroism. Comic books are generally classified as *entertainment* rather than *art*, but for many they serve as a modern *Bildungsroman* – a coming of age story that teaches us how to be and how to grow. From these low sources, we derive some of our highest aspirations. The heroes we find in comic books become our role models and their conflicts become prototypes for our everyday struggles.

And yet, comic books present so many problematic resolutions to their conflicts. Yes, superheroes might be brave and strong, but can we still learn from a role model that solves every problem through violence? How do we act on the ideals of the comic book in a world marred by the same forces that generated their androcentric and borderline-fascist tendencies?

The goal of the prints, collages, and paintings I produced is to rehabilitate the symbols and conventions used by comic books to convey virtue. By isolating these components and using them to create new compositions, the works challenge the oversimplified, streamlined narrative comic books present. Simple rules of engagement in the form of color separation and layering provide a logical framework that generates the work. This process and the material means I employ demonstrate to the viewer the artifice inherent to the source material, complicating the relationship between virtues and the beefy arms and pointed firearms that have come to denote them.

The resulting 21 pieces are by far the best work I have yet produced. It has provided me with a substantial portfolio of work and unquantifiable improvements in my technical skills. It also was instrumental in earning me the studio art department's Aunspaugh Fifth Year Fellowship. That in mind, I would like to take a moment to thank a few people who made this project possible. First, I would like to thank Sandy and Vinie Miller, Evie and Stephen Colbert, and the other donors who made the Miller Arts Scholars program possible. Second, I would like to thank Dean Dass, who worked diligently with me throughout the length of this project. We met at least once a week to discuss my work for nearly a year. His criticism, encouragement, and expertise were invaluable to both this projects development and my own development as an artist. Finally, I would like to thank Eric Schmidt. Without his technical knowledge and near-limitless patience, this project never would have gotten off the ground.

Images



*Bystanders / Not Heroes*



*Dominance and Authority*