

The Paper Mache Vagina

by

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Alan Sakata was looking at the 5000th vagina that he'd downloaded on the Internet when something changed. An epiphany. Suddenly the vagina became completely disassociated from the woman. Alan began to get lost in its contours and colors and he thought, "What an interesting thing it is, in and of itself."

"It's almost contraption-like," he thought. "Like one of those old comical inventions they used to show on television. A couple of whoopee cushions hooked up to a billows, with a funny kind of Boy Scout cap thing in the middle."

He also thought of some common metaphors -- lilies, orchids, pomegranates, and cherries. Flowers and fruits.

He considered what a powerful force the thing was. The *face* that launched a thousand ships couldn't compare. It was the crotch that was history's real mover and shaker.

With that, he determined to make one of his own. He would craft his own vagina. Make it just the way he wanted.

Alan's morning classes were dull. He'd learned some good stuff at art school, but whenever he thought about the money it was costing, he wondered whether it was worth it. They were studying pop art now -- Lichtenstein, Warhol, Hockney. Trying to dissect them -- to understand their value and their contribution. Alan had a hard time staying with the day's lecture. He thought about his vagina.

Alan really just wanted to make things. He enjoyed learning about his predecessors -- Michelangelo, the impressionists, Warhol -- but the real reason he loved art -- and he really didn't even think about it as art, per se -- was that it allowed him to tell people about the world -- to editorialize about the things around him.

Alan's first critical acclaim came when he was a junior in high school. Each morning he took the bus to school. At the bus stop every day were the same group of young Indian men. Each was dressed in a pair of tan Dockers and a cotton dress shirt. No ties. And a laptop bag hung from each of their shoulders.

They all seemed the same to Alan. They all had mustaches and cell phones hooked to their belts. They all had big black eyes and passionless faces, and talked about their mortgages, their children, and software. They were uninteresting and yet captured his curiosity -- sort of like the vagina.

He painted a portrait of the men and titled it *Hindus at the Bus Stop*.

In art class, Alan got heat from the teacher about the title. She told him to call it something else. But one of his Indian classmates came to his defense saying that, as an Indian, he wasn't offended. He said, "Well, that's what it is. -- a bunch of Hindus at a bus stop."

That, and the fact that Alan himself was from a minority, made the teacher back off. Alan entered the painting in an all-California youth art contest that summer and won first prize. The painting was alternately on display at the Getty and the De Young that year. All of a

sudden, what was initially politically incorrect became very politically correct. The Indians who saw it especially loved it -- they were honored by it, in a strange way.

It was an Indian man who eventually bought the painting for \$3,000, which paid for a 1998 Honda Civic. And Alan didn't have to ride the bus anymore.

But it was never intended to be an object of right or wrong. It was just how he saw that piece of his world, that's all. To Alan, Hindus at a bus stop and vaginas on the Internet were one and the same.

Alan decided that the basic construction of the vagina would be paper mache.

Alan didn't know much about doing paper mache. He knew it involved chicken wire and paste made from flour and starch. In order to brush up on the specifics he had to consult the Internet. While there, he decided to download more vaginas.

He went to one of his favorite porn sites. It had numerous pictures and videos of vaginas, oral copulation, orgasms -- you name it. And it was all free. Alan rarely paid for porn. He felt it was unethical. Besides, he found that the free clips usually had the best content anyway. Like trailers for feature films, the preview clips show the best parts in order to hook you in.

This time, he wanted close-ups of just vaginas. No man, no semen, just the form of the vagina itself. This was surprisingly hard to find. But eventually he found what he needed. He studied the folds and contours. They reminded him of chicken livers, and also of fluttering heart valves that he'd seen in documentaries about the human body.

This wasn't the first time Alan had created a piece based on the human form. About a year after *Hindus at the Bus Stop*, Alan did a sculpture titled *The Butt Tattoo*. He had originally called it *Angela's Butt Tattoo*.

The Butt Tattoo was modeled after the butt of Angela Marsdale, a woman who served drinks in his father's sports bar. She had this tattoo on her lower back. It's a fairly common thing among women in their late 20s and 30s, but Angela was well into her 40s. She must have been one of the first women on the planet to get one when they first came into fashion. And hers had stretched and morphed into a large blob that had a point on the bottom conspicuously dipping down into her crack. A spill of purple ink trickling down her crack. On top of that, she wore low-riding jeans so everyone could see it. As repulsive as it and its owner were, Alan was captivated.

One of the customers in the bar told him that the reason woman get butt tattoos is so when they're gettin' it doggie style their boyfriends have something to look at -- to entertain themselves. The imagery overwhelmed Alan and he had to do something with it.

For the buttocks, he went to Toys R Us and bought a big rubber bouncy ball. He deflated it and cut it in half. He then stuffed each side with rags. He smooshed the two halves together, side by side, and it looked just like an ass.

For the lower back, he took an ordinary pillow and folded it in half and placed it above the buttocks. Angela had a fat lower back. Her love handles were wider than her butt itself, so it really looked like her.

He then tucked cotton in some strategic places to soften the folds. It would be mounted on plywood and hung on the wall. All he needed was skin -- something to cover it with.

He went to the fabric store, but couldn't find the right thing. A few days later he was driving around and saw it -- an old armchair was out on the street with a "free" sign on it. The material covering the chair was faded beige silk. It had an embroidered pattern of small palm leaves that looked very stretchmarky.

When he brought the chair home, his dad asked him about it. He told his dad it was for an art project. His dad nodded. It was a line he'd heard many times.

Alan was grateful that his dad was cool. He liked him for that. But he also seemed a bit sad. Divorced and pretty much estranged from Alan's grandparents, he had no other family. He was the co-owner of a struggling sports bar in a seedy San Jose strip mall.

Alan's dad referred to his customers as "the drunks."

"We need to get ready to open. The drunks will be here soon."

"Boy, the drunks were out in force tonight."

"Business is slow; where are all the drunks?"

One of the drunks once said to Alan, "Your dad is the most un-Japanese, Japanese man I know." Alan thought, knowing his dad, that he would like that.

The final stage of creating *The Butt Tattoo* was the tattoo itself. To do this, Alan used colored sharpies and then dabbed the completed design with wet cotton balls to make it more blurry.

When Alan's dad saw the final product he busted out laughing. "Shit, it looks just like her." When Alan told him it was called *Angela's Butt Tattoo*, he laughed even harder, but then said, "Aw, Alan, you can't call it that. If she finds out, she'll get the cops after me for sexual harassment."

He then changed the name to *The Butt Tattoo*.

He tried entering it in the same contest as *Hindus at the Bus Stop*, but it was turned down for being inappropriate for a youth art contest. However, he did include it as part of his

portfolio when he applied to art school. It also helped him decide to switch his focus from painting to sculpture.

Alan had just got the chicken wire form to the shape he wanted when he heard a couple of loud car-door slams. The next thing he heard was a woman yell, “Fuckin’ A, Tracy, you were telling that bitch tonight. You were telling her! Fuckin’ A.”

Tracy and her posse of lesbians were home.

Tracy Augustine was Alan’s apartment manager’s younger sister. She was Filipino and about Alan’s age -- younger than her brother who was in his mid-thirties.

Among Tracy’s group of friends was a fat Korean girl named Junie. She was very butch. She had a long chain hanging from her jeans and liked to wear wife-beater shirts. Alan’s nickname for her was “Porky.” She was the one who used the phrase “Fuckin’ A” in every sentence.

What mystified Alan was that Tracy herself was quite attractive. Other than that she drove a pick-up, there was nothing butch about her. No tattoos, cropped hair, or piercings (Porky had all three). And she had an amazingly infectious smile.

He knew he wasn’t supposed to think it, but whenever he saw her and she would smile at him, he would think to himself, “what a waste.”

It was getting late, but Alan continued to work on his vagina. He wanted to get the paper mache on that night so it could dry the next day while he was at school. However, the party outside just kept getting louder and louder.

“Fuckin’ A! Fuuuuuckin’ Aaaaaa!!!!”

Finally, he'd had enough.

There were four of them gathered around the back of Tracy's pick-up, beers and cigarettes all around.

As Alan approached, Porky shouted out, "Hey, it's Picasso! Fuckin' A." (She had her nickname for him as well.)

"Hi Junie ...Tracy."

"Hey, Alan." Tracy smiled.

"So how long are you guys gonna be out here? It's like a school night for me."

"What? We too loud?" asked Porky.

"Well, yeah. A little."

"We're just about to go inside," said Tracy. "It's just nice out. This is like one of the first really warm nights of the year."

Alan looked at Tracy. This time *she* was the one wearing the wife-beater shirt. He noticed her bra strap hanging loosely from her smooth brown shoulder. She wore a crucifix that hung down between the tops of her breasts.

She noticed him staring and smiled again.

Porky noticed that as well. She glared at Alan.

"C'mon guys, lets go inside," said Tracy.

"Wait a minute, Trace. Let me finish my smoke." Porky continued to glare at Alan.

The next morning Alan was sitting in the coffee shop across the street from the art school. It was going to be another day of lectures. Today was The Sociology of Art, a course discussing how art through the ages reflected trends in society, asking the old question: “Is art the mirror of society or does art influence society?” Alan didn’t care.

Despite his cynicism towards the curriculum, Alan loved art school and couldn’t imagine himself anywhere else. The funny thing about artists, though, is that they tend to be isolated. There weren’t the usual cliques that you’d expect from college students, at least not in Alan’s experience. He was also a stranger to Los Angeles. Alan was a loner.

It was really a fluke that he got to go to art school at all. He was on track to go to community college like the rest of his friends -- do a couple of years at a JC, then transfer to a state school. He wanted to go art school; he’d even applied. But, as his dad said, “Unless you get a scholarship, or I win the lottery, we just can’t afford it.” But, in the spring of his senior year Alan’s grandfather died.

Alan’s dad hadn’t spoken to his parents for ten years. Nevertheless, he and Alan drove down to Watsonville for the funeral. After it was over, his dad had a long conversation with his Grandma Kyo, during which he told her about Alan’s desire to go to art school. A week later, there was a check in the mail to cover all the costs for all four years.

When he got home from school that afternoon, Alan found that the paper mache wasn’t drying the way he had expected. The pattern of the chicken wire was showing through. He realized it was going to take at least another layer to make the surface smooth. He also noticed that parts of the surface were either flat or concave where they needed to be convex. To remedy this he would need to add additional layers. The medium of paper Mache was proving a little trickier than he’d expected.

As he was finishing the second layer, there was a knock at the door. He looked through the curtains. It was Tracy Augustine. He went to the door and opened it.

He looked down at her through the screen door. She was wearing cotton shorts, flip-flops and a t-shirt.

“Hi, Alan.”

“Hi.”

“I’m sorry about last night.”

“It’s ok.”

She looked through the screen door. Her eyes landed on the vagina.

“What are you working on?”

“Uh, it’s nothing. Just something for school.”

“Can I see? I like the stuff you do.”

“Well, you might, like, get offended or something ... I mean, you promise you won’t get upset?”

She opened the screen door. “Yeah, whatever.”

Once inside she began to snigger. “Shit, Alan! What the fuck are you doin’?”

“I dunno.” He chuckled along with her. “It just kinda struck me to do it. But it’s kind of getting out of control.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I’m having to build up parts of it in order to make it smooth. But when I do it, the proportion gets all screwed up. It’s looking less realistic.”

She walked closer to the table. She put her hand on it. She smiled. “It’s wet.”

“Very funny.” He smiled back.

He looked at the vagina. It looked like a cantaloupe that had a wedge cut from it. The part that was the clitoris looked like someone had jammed a big strawberry into the top of the space where the wedge was removed. It was not erotic in the least.

“Maybe I need to start over.”

Tracy looked at him. “You need a model.”

“What?”

“Do you want to look at mine ... I mean to give you some ideas?”

“Are you serious?”

Tracy walked into Alan’s kitchen. Her eyes stayed on Alan. In the kitchen, she slipped off the cotton shorts and her panties in one quick motion and sat up on the table, spread her legs, and looked down at herself. She then looked back at Alan.

His heart was banging like a jackhammer.

He walked over, not sure exactly what to think. He played along. He sat in a chair and positioned himself like a doctor about to do a pelvic exam. Every inch of his body was rigid and quivering.

He was taken by how small her vagina was. How petite it was. Most of her pubic hair had been shaved. Only the area in the middle of her mons, just above the clit, had hair.

“It’s small.” He said. “Mine looks like some kind of grotesque cartoon.”

She laughed.

“What is it?” he asked.

“You said *mine*. Like you have one of your own or something.”

“I mean your parts ... in comparison ... the inside and all.”

“Here,” she said. She scooted her butt forward and brought her knees up. With that, her clit popped out a bit more and he could see the pink insides of her walls. He touched her there. As he was looking, she rested her calves on his shoulders.

He felt her getting wet. He looked up and she was staring at him. She bit her lower lip.

“I thought you were a lesbian.”

“I am what I am,” she said.

The next day was Saturday. After Alan got up, he took another look at his creation. He suddenly saw the thing in a new light. He decided that, instead of starting over, he would take things in a different direction.

It was no longer going to be an anatomically correct vagina; it would now be a caricature of a vagina. A commentary on his own twisted perception. This freed him. He was no longer bound by color and textures and form.

The skin would be pale; the hairs dark. Snow White's vagina. He thought of giving it ample pubic hair like the vaginas he remembered from his childhood -- ones he'd seen in his dad's Playboy magazines -- making the hairs out of springs or something. But he decided that he wanted it to be a contemporary vagina and decided to use uncooked spaghetti -- to create what was called a racing stripe. However, for this he would paint the spaghetti purple and dark orange and brown.

It became a delightful monstrosity.

At the end of the school year the students gave a show. Rather than using one of the pieces he'd done in class, Alan contributed the vagina.

It was too large to transport in his Honda so he asked Tracy if she would take it in her truck. She was thrilled to help.

As they were carrying it through the courtyard of the apartment complex, Porky was there. When she saw it, she was, for the first time, speechless.

She then finally said, "Fuckin' A. That looks like something a lesbian would do."

Alan looked at her, smiled broadly, and answered, "Fuckin' A."

Alan asked Tracy to accompany him to the show. It was a typical collection of art school patrons and alumni, swirling glasses of wine and exchanging meaningless chitchat.

Alan and Tracy stood off together and watched as people strolled by the big vagina. Throughout the afternoon, Tracy stayed with him, holding his hand, nuzzling him, and playing the part of his girlfriend, making him feel warm and good inside.

At one point, he overheard one of the wine swirlers comment that the vagina exhibited great soul.

Alan put his lips to Tracy's ear and whispered, "It's just a stupid vagina."

END