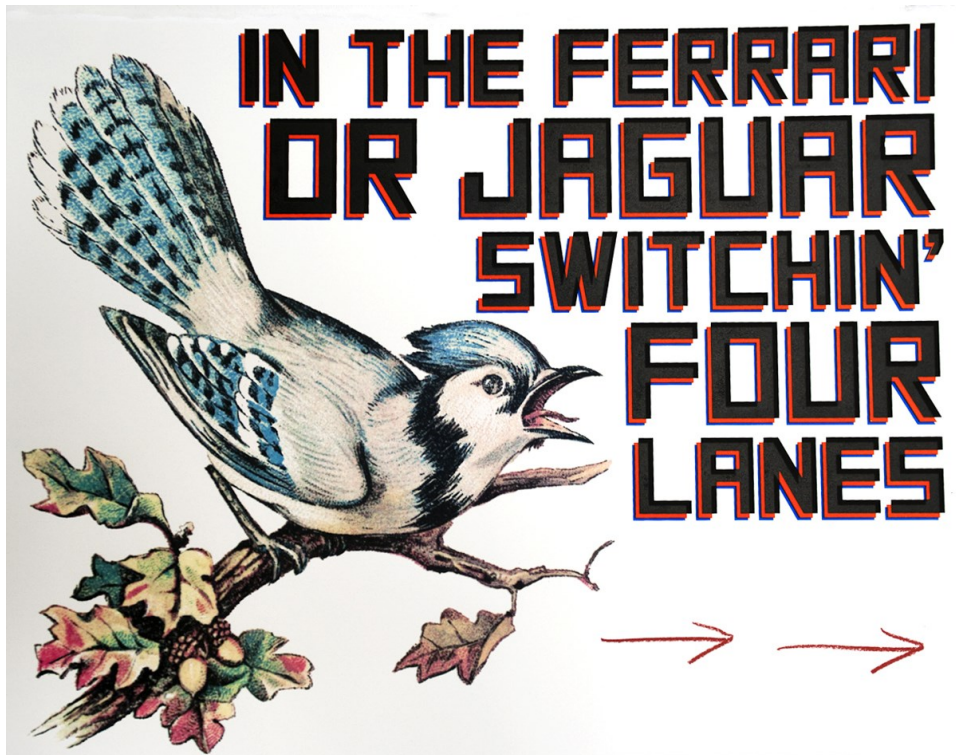




Oh Hey Bro, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 15" x 41", 2014



(Top down, screamin'out) Money ain't a thing, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 11" x 15", 2014



Right Here, Yo, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 15" x 40", 2014



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This publication accompanies the exhibition *So Much Ice*, presented at the Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, from January 7th—February 26th, 2016.

List of works

- Amplitudes*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 22" x 22", 2014
- Check Me Out*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 15" x 40", 2014
- Gimme The Loot*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 14" x 14", 2014
- Moral Hazard*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 22" x 22", 2014
- Oh Hey Bro*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 15" x 41", 2014
- Oh Hey Bro*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 11" x 14", 2013
- Penn State*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 10" x 10", 2013
- Right Here, Yo*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 15" x 40", 2014
- So Much Ice*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 15" x 41", 2014
- (Top down, screamin'out) Money ain't a thing*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 11" x 15", 2014
- What's Beef?*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 22" x 28", 2014
- You Better Ask Yourself*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 14" x 14", 2014

Director: Amber Andersen
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Cover: *So Much Ice*, ultra-violet cured silkscreen on paper, 15" x 41", 2014

All images courtesy of the artist.

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ROBERT TRUSZKOWSKI / SO MUCH ICE
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A Field Guide to *So Much Ice*

By David Dyck

*At the end of the day, I want my work to ask questions, in the truest definition of what it is to make art. I encode meaning – not to hide – but to incite investigation. In some ways, I hope my work is analogous to the crumpled receipts that emerge, weeks or months old from an unworn jacket, “begging me” to keep them. In doing so, they problematize my seemingly innocuous relationship to the structures that govern my daily existence, and demand vigilant interrogation of my complicity therein. Love is a two-way street.*¹

-Robert Truszkowski, Regina, November 2011.

Robert Truszkowski creates deeply layered screen prints that speak the language of pop culture and current events. Fragments of rap lyrics and news headlines share space with a varied collection of graphical and pictorial elements, gathered from old advertisements, field guides, wallpaper and studio detritus. These works that appear tacked to the wall as if posters in a teenager’s bedroom, on closer inspection, reveal themselves to be held up with carefully spaced magnets. Truszkowski’s work is like this, initially seeming flippant, but offering more depth upon further inspection.

On first view, these works appear to share the attributes of the Internet meme, where user generated text is superimposed over found imagery. The most apparent text when first encountering this body of work are the ones that whether consciously or subconsciously, are hammered into our heads every day – verses from popular songs, parts of headlines, the punch lines from memes that stream constantly through any social media feed. My own impulse is to steel myself when exposed to this sort of thing, to have a hurried laugh, and move on. However, as quickly as Truszkowski’s source material sets up these intrinsic expectations, his work breaks them down. Truszkowski takes these words and images seriously.

The widespread industrial adoption of screen-printing was originally rooted in advertising, where it was appreciated for its ability to quickly reproduce images for mass distribution. Now mostly outmoded for this purpose, it has been replaced by exponentially faster digital technology. Screen printing as a vehicle for the mass delivery of information is embedded in the history of the ever more quickly reproducible, a predecessor to today’s digital image.

Perhaps in acknowledgment of this, Truszkowski’s particular style of printmaking draws on a range of processes for the creation of this work, balancing contemporary digital image manipulation technology with traditional handmade processes. Time spent with this work is rewarding beyond the expectation held for an on screen image. Small details compel the viewer to take a closer look, revealing many features in the work that can only be experienced in person. Gaining a deeper understanding of image through his process is his rationale for “why it took 35 printed layers to make [and why he] spent an awful lot of time with this image, and deciding what it meant [as] it continued to unravel ... in terms of what the meaning was.”²

Truszkowski’s massively multi-layer handling of the medium reveals itself through passages of these prints where he has gone so far as to modify the sheen of the surface with gloss varnish to make a bird’s feathers shine, or to shift the tone and texture of the paper by printing over with a slightly different white, or devoting an entire layer of the print to a tiny

bit of simulated paint overspray. Each of these layers entails the creation of a specific screen that must be processed through the entire edition of prints.

While this heavy layering builds the physical presence of the work, the presentation strategy here helps as well: there is no frame and no glass between the viewer and the work; we are confronted with the material reality of the thing itself.

The broad range of references at play in Truszkowski’s work ensures that it brings to mind different things for different viewers. From the perspective of a ravenous consumer, these pieces of text, with their similarity to a sound bite or a brief Tweet, allude to a superficial Internet mediated engagement with culture. The language employed here is both familiar and obscure. Some of the lyrical fragments are sure to key in to popular songs of a certain era. The phrase *What’s Beef?* starts the eponymous Notorious B.I.G. song playing in my head, answer: “Beef is when I see you/Guaranteed to be in ICU.”³ Yet, there is ambiguity here too, this phrase could be read as a shout out to the teen consumer show *Street Cents*⁴ with its recurring segment *What’s Your Beef?* or an honest question sprung from linguistic ignorance. Alternatively, the text “moral hazard” had me reading through *The Economic Times* for a definition.⁵ Truszkowski’s reverent stance towards the hip-hop canon is evident through much of the language used in this work. Through their repetition and meticulous treatment in print, these phrases seem to have become personal mantras.

In another acknowledgment of rap lyrics “Gimme the loot / Gimme the loot”⁶ is repeated in Truszkowski’s *Gimme the loot* as it is in the original rap lyric. The juxtaposition of a repeated lyric with the image of a songbird shifts the form of the rap lyric into that of a natural song, perhaps an attempt to flatten the nature / culture dichotomy. Likewise, in *Money Ain’t a Thing* the conspicuous display of “in the Ferrari or Jaguar switching four lanes” seems to be equated with an avian courtship ritual. The works in *So Much Ice* could be considered zoomorphic in this way.

Although the texts presented are artefacts from the pervasive information culture that we participate in daily, the images that accompany them seem to be chosen from an entirely different archive. These are familiar, even quaint, images from a different era, in contrast to the gangsta rap verses that they are presented with here.

The wallpaper pattern used in *So Much Ice* offers an alternative pace of looking to the one encouraged by the always-on parade of digital information. Who has not stared at the wallpaper of a childhood home for enough accumulated time to have the pattern irreversibly burned into their mind? This is a very long look, accomplished over years, if not decades. This contrasts with the glancing blows of the digital image, specifically social media, scrolled through at such a pace so as to struggle to recall details even minutes later.

Truszkowski’s birds, perfectly composed on their perches, allude to illustrations from birding field guides. The prevalence of birds as subject in this work also suggests an agreement with the attitude prevalent in bird watching. In their hobby, birders practice a particularly intense way of looking that requires research, record keeping and specialized equipment. The patience required to get a glimpse of a rare bird is a good analogue for viewing this work with all its detail.

Truszkowski’s images offer a disconcerting counterpoint to the words they share the paper with. They are the opposite of what they first appear to be. This work presents challenges in

the dissonance it creates between our own reactions to the style of left-swiped⁷ digital images and the subtlety and consideration with which Truszkowski handles his medium. This dissonant comparison gives rise to a productive ambiguity, suggesting a tension between the relationship of consciousness to the accelerating barrage of images presented on-screen for our instant gratification. Truszkowski’s rewriting of the words in his work, and his making of prints in such a painstakingly layered way is to take something as fluid as urban vernacular or corporate buzzwords and give it a high degree of permanence.

The juxtaposition between fast and slow reading of the varied references in *So Much Ice* supports Truszkowski’s stated desire for his “work to ask questions”⁸, and leaves me with some productive questions of my own:

Can appropriation be performed until it becomes authenticity?

What does it mean to enjoy these cultural “snippets”?

Can we slow ourselves down?

#amiright?

1. Robert Truszkowski, “Contextualization of my practice,” *Robert Truszkowski – 2015 err 2016 (sorta)*, 2016, <http://www.truszkowski.org/contextualization-of-my-practice.html>

2. “Prairie Post Modern - Robert Truszkowski 2012,” YouTube video, 12:35, Posted by “truszkowski,” June 13, 2012, <https://youtu.be/VQTTu2WlrxU>.

3. “Biggie Smalls - What’s Beef?,” YouTube video, 5:17, Posted by “OriginalHipHopMusic,” April 5, 2009, <https://youtu.be/94bNyh6BBB0>.

4. *Street Cents* was a staple Canadian teen consumer report show popular in the 1990s. The recurring segment *What’s Your Beef?* featured teens airing grievances about inferior products and services.

5. Moral Hazard: In a financial market, there is a risk that the borrower might engage in activities that are undesirable from the lender’s point of view because they make him less likely to pay back a loan. It occurs when the borrower knows that someone else will pay for the mistake he makes. This in turn gives him the incentive to act in a riskier way. This economic concept is known as moral hazard.⁹

a. “Definition of ‘Moral Hazard’,” *The Economic Times*, N.D., <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/moral-hazard>

6. “Gimme The Loot - Biggie (Original Version),” YouTube video, 5:08, Posted by “HollowBastian,” June 11, 2009, <https://youtu.be/ZzvL4O3uomg>.

7. On the dating app Tinder, swiping left on an image indicates rejection.

8. Robert Truszkowski, “Contextualization of my practice”.