

Truth, Lies and Twinkies

Excellent Center's HEAL Examines Our Lies and Times

by David Ciaffardini

We may all be members-or victims-of the Twinkie generation. The Hostess Twinkie, as a metaphor for life, is expounded on profoundly in the Human Education Against Lies exhibition at the Excellent Center for Art and Culture in Grover Beach.

To visit the exhibition you'll have to walk beneath Charley Goodman's Archway of Twinkies and experience hundreds of individually wrapped snack cakes rising over you from ground to ceiling.

Stepping through this golden (yellow dye No. 40) gateway leads to multi-media exhibit of newspaper and magazine clippings, working televisions, photographs and paintings that make the Twinkies metaphor become clear: Americans willingly swallow mass quantities of anything-especially lies-if served soft and syrupy. Throw in not-



too-subtle sexual symbolism, as Hostess did with its phallic cake, and you could have a winner-a product massively and mindlessly consumed by millions of Americans.

The proof is in the Twinkies. It's also in the attic's worth of ironic magazine and newspaper clippings that Goodman, the center's director, juxtaposes with contributions from other artists, including as internationals cast of "mail artists" who mailed in works from as far away as Australia and Czechoslovakia.

The exhibition points out that just as Twinkies are hybrid of food and junk, with emphasis on the latter, mass media has become a sickening hybrid of truth and lies as proved by samples from old Time magazines, front pages of the San Francisco Chronicle, and other establishment information sources that in retrospect seem ridiculously oblivious to reality.

The real story, as the exhibition reveals through irony, humor, and basic historical documentation, is always between the lines. So, despite being a show about lies and criminal acts perpetrated by our leaders and our media, the exhibition retains a hopeful and healing spirit by pointing out that as the years go by the propaganda and social atrocities are being recognized and documented.

Human Education Against Lies, or H.E.A.L. is a concept borrowed from a multi-artist rap music album put out by Elektra Entertainment. "The H.E.A.L. manifesto," Goodman explained, "was to point out where lies existed in life and institutions, but instead of just complaining about it, getting up and doing something about it. They weren't going to wait for the same people who are trying to kill them to save them."

In the context of H.E.A.L., Goodman's Twinkie archway is not about food. It's about

malnutrition of the soul, emaciation of truth, and the deadly virus of misinformation traced from Saigon to Dallas, to Kent State, Watergate, Granada, Panama, Nicaragua, and the Middle East. It's about political manipulation and obfuscation that made it possible for former police officer Dan White to create the infamous "Twinkie Defense" to justify assassinating San Francisco's liberal mayor George Moscone and grass-smoking, gay county supervisor Harvey Milk.

For these horrible, premeditated crimes, White spent less than five years in prison, having convinced the court he became temporarily insane from eating too many twinkies in the days leading to the murders.

The H.E.A.L. show may convince you - if there was doubt in your mind-that many of the men who have controlled the destiny of America during the last three decades were crooks, pathological liars, and bad actors.

H.E.A.L. argues that for anyone in the media to proclaim men like Richard Nixon, Oliver North, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush as heroes is like food scientists announcing that Twinkies are manna from heaven.

It is fascinating how Mark Bryan's masterful portraits of Nixon, Reagan and Bush as a demonic triad of soul-dead leaders looks closer to realism than caricature.

The show serves as an exorcism, Goodman explained: "I want to inspire people and help them recognize that we have a history of rising above something bad like Nixon. There is no way I could say that eloquently in words and be as effective as presenting it in a surreal fashion like this."

Goodman's passion for setting the historical record straight has roots in his experience as a Navy enlistee during the Vietnam War. "I got up to Saigon and that was where you really saw what was going on and what that war was really about," Goodman explained. "That's where all the war profiteers were. All of American industry was there funneling the building blocks for the new nation they were going to steal away from the Vietnamese after they won the war. It didn't have anything to do with democracy or any of that."

"You go over there so blindly for a cause and find out it's not the cause and there's nothing but stupidity everywhere. It kind of twists you out and you start to see irony everywhere. You realize there's a million lies out there that people like to believe rather than face the truth."

In trying to expose a million lies, it's not surprising Goodman has a warehouse of material that has yet to make it into an exhibition.

"I didn't even tap this incredible collection of the fundamentalist televangelists," he said. "I've got all their albums."

The H.E.A.L. show is a belly full of information about our country's political leaders, wars, scandals, murders and injustices that the twinkle generation has gobbled up.

Horrible, sneaky, dirty lies softened, filled with sweet goo, made bite size and delivered through TV, newspapers, magazines, and radio. This exhibition put it all in historical, sometimes hysterical, perspective and proves that truth will rise to the top when the water clears a bit.