

## Artist Statement

**Proposal:** This follow up to the “leopard spots” on the house at 1623 W. Estes (Fig. 1) envisions a transformation that seeks to convey a house swaddled in a drape of the very recognizable Burberry plaid to be painted over after one year in a fashion as yet to be determined . (Fig.2)



Fig 1



Fig. 2

This Burberry phase is the completion of a two syllable joke. It is told in a genre that came into being out of a consensus process amongst the residents of the house around what color to paint it in 2003. We were seeking a combination of colors that would please all the members of the household. My most strongly held criterion was that the colors should go well with the brown and tan roof. Other members held out for a combination that was fittingly outrageous. Meanwhile others were stumping for colors that showed more restraint. The result serves as an illustration of how far out of the box one can be lured through the consensus process.

The public response to the “leopard spots” was mixed. A letter from a neighbor expressing her disappointment with the results because of its perceived impact on home sales stands beside an admission from a neighbor that she bought a condo next door because of the spots. She went so far as to have her keys cut from leopard spotted blanks. Perhaps my particular favorite response to the paint job occurred while I was nearing completion of the project. A cyclist whizzing past broke into spontaneous laughter.

Over the years, it became a commonplace to see people taking photographs of the house or stopping in their walks to express their appreciation for the design. My pleasure in hearing these flattering comments has been tempered by a number of factors. First, my dissatisfaction with the work at a technical level. The spots are not a convincing representation of any living animal. Some people have said, with good reason, that they look like giraffe spots. Or maybe cheetah. Second, a lurking suspicion that people who actively dislike the design are among those who walk past without comment. But most germane to this proposal, I feel the mixed feelings of a conductor at the sound of applause between movements of a symphony. This piece is not finished.

For years it has been my enduring ambition to deliver the punchline that the spotted house sets up: Burberry plaid.

This idea has the undying power to make me chuckle whenever I contemplate it. Admittedly a silly idea, it would not be inappropriate to hear it accompanied by a cow bell, a trombone “BLATTT!” or some slapstick “BOI-OI-OI-OINNNNGGG.” But there are aspects of it that go beyond the cheap laugh. There is the social commentary that goes along with ones clothing choice. The odd arrival of fabric patterns on the exterior of a house. The history of not being able to please everyone with bold expressions. The jarring trajectory that takes one from a puss print associated with sexuality and license to the opposite extreme of one of the most staid and stuffy plaids. The implication that through the passing of time we all grow more conservative is offset with the glaring irony that anyone conservative enough to aspire to the ideals associated with Burberry would die fighting, WOULD KILL! before consenting to such a pattern on the outside of their home. Here I might interject an auxiliary and very temporary component to the proposal: A large banner in primary colors attached at a diagonal proclaiming “UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT!” This would stay up for a only couple of days.

The question has been ask whether Burberry plaid represents a faithful representation of our identity as a household. The answer is of course not. That’s because it’s a joke. You don’t have to go far back in the history of comedy to find examples of very pointed uses of self parody. [LINK](#) Sarah Silverman [LINK](#) Louis CK. The consolation in this proposal is the relatively short time needed to deliver the second part of the message.

The successful execution of the design poses a few crucial technical challenges. The more faithful the rendition of the pattern, the better the laugh. (That is, within reason. The actual colors of Burberry plaid are hideous and DON’T MATCH THE ROOF! But there are plenty of approximations that will still read as Burberry without resorting to beige.) Also, the closer to an illusion of thick wool by making the edges indistinct and “fluffy,” the more likely this piece will achieve the secondary success of making it slightly more uncomfortable to look at in summer than in winter. Witness the opposite effect with the spots.

In our experience, the age of the Internet allows our “leopard house” to exist and enjoy fame in a number of overlapping spheres. Our friends old and new come by and are often surprised, usually delighted, when they first pull up. Photos taken by strangers end up on blogs. The commentary

runs hot and cold and every once in a while friends will alert us by sharing a link. Reporters have dropped by to do stories. These also add to the Googleability of our address. So the idea of replacing one controversial pattern with another even more controversial pattern occurs with the expectation that the two would come to exist side by side in a number of places in the blogosphere. Possibly even with sound effects!

This proposal is submitted with an air of urgency and desperation that should be examined. First the time to paint the house is upon us. Large chunks of the paint are starting to fall off. We could easily do touch ups but eleven years is a reasonable life span for a paint job, if on the short side. Another time factor is that the roof needs replacing. Since this proposal is only for a year, the next phase could be the start of a new era with a new-colored roof. Another pressing factor is my slowly deteriorating physical condition. With an uncontrolled viral load, increasing resistance to the available HIV meds and now a rheumatoid condition that they suspect may be an auto immune disorder, this may be the last summer I can attempt such an undertaking. I pray I'm wrong but don't want to gamble on it.

Now here is where the desperation comes from. I would like to have had some sort of impact on my nieces and nephews. The fact of being excluded from child rearing is a well guarded but very tender spot. The sting of being held at arm's length while they were growing up goads me to leave an enduring mark. A mark of such singular intensity that it might one day provoke someone to say "Hey, check this. This was my uncle Michael's house." I've done a few pieces of guerilla art on billboards of which I am rather proud. And the leopard spots too are something impressive to look at. But this would make it feel like a masterpiece in my mind. And with a great sense of relief and accomplishment I could put my brushes to rest.

Editor's Note September 2019

The resolution to the question was to paint the house porch Burberry plaid.

