

HOLY CRAP (!),

*Kim Kardashian*

AND

OTHER

M-OVE—MEN---T-----S {!} {!}

(NO SHIT!)

By

*Kenneth Levine*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUZE writes... I remember going to the Chicago Contemporary Art Museum and seeing an installation of a toilet coated in 24 karat gold and wondering whether that was a statement on how we can take an everyday shitter and turn it into art or whether you wasted pure gold on shit.*

*When you look at a painting, perhaps a piece of contemporary art, or, hell, when you read a piece of fiction how do you determine its worth? Or, even simpler still, whether it is good or bad? Subjective perception – i.e. you just like it? Or maybe a set of criteria that you've established through education and criticism? I guess it's one of those age-old questions: how does one determine if art is shit or not?*

*Well, have I a story for you.*

*Kenneth Levine's, "Holy Crap, Kim Kardashian and Other Movements," takes this question not so seriously, but arguably both literally and figuratively.*

*One day, our speaker takes a shit that looks like Jesus and the rest of sphincter sculptures are history.*

*Humor and satire aside, I think that at the heart of Levine's piece lies the constitution of art – how much cultural weight do we/should ascribe?, are materials more important than substance?, does a movement count as a piece of history or a fad?, how many ways can one slip in poop puns?, is one man's shit another man's treasure?*

*The piece is clever, the idea fibrous, the pace is smooth, and the read is well worth a sit down at your favorite bowl.*

*Thanks, Kenneth, nice work.*

*Read this story, folks. It's as philosophical as it is farcical.*

*Five stars.*

### **QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)**

A week later, on Monday night, I had an epiphany while watching a comedian on television hold up a photo of my turd and say, "A Robert Shapiro of West Hartford, Connecticut had a bowel movement that looked like Jesus Christ. Is this for real? It looks like Jesus was in the rectum instead of the rectory."

### Holy Crap, Kim Kardashian and Other Movements

By Kenneth Levine

I sat on the toilet in the position of Rodin's The Thinker. I'd already taken a dump, but was stuck in place. It was Sunday morning, and I had the Sunday morning blues. Tomorrow I had to work at my law firm instead of painting and sculpting. I had listened to my parents: "Be a lawyer, not an artist. You'll need money to pay bills." I supposed they had been right; I'd been a practicing attorney for a couple of years with a decent salary, but none of my paintings or sculptures had sold. Eventually the stench of stool was too much to bear, and so I rose to flush and wipe.

Jesus Christ on the cross stared at me from the murky depths of the bowl. His hands were nailed to the transverse and His feet to the upright with what looked like bits of almonds. His arms were extended into a wide V or an imperfect W if his head, slumped on His right shoulder, were counted. His knees bent left, the lines of his calves at a ninety-degree angle with those of his thighs. His hair, which was white as snow, presumably from last night's cauliflower and lemongrass, covered his head, cheeks, upper lip, and jaw, and spilled onto His shoulders. He was naked, and His body was streaked with the blood of strawberries and cherries.

I stared at Him in disbelief. I'm a Jewish atheist, so what did I know about Jesus? I couldn't describe Christ, the Virgin Mary and other holy figures, but, like Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, who said about pornography, "I know it when I see it," I knew them when I saw them.

I wiped myself, tossed the soiled toilet paper in the garbage, and leaving Jesus undisturbed, sat at my bedroom desk and googled "Jesus Christ sightings." I found an image of Him in a Northern Lights display near the Town of Akranes, Iceland; the breasting of a chicken dinner; a split log; bird droppings on a car window; the side of a mixing bowl; and many other unusual places. If His image could appear in Martha McDougal's bathroom mold in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, it could be in my toilet.

I took pictures of Christ and uploaded them to YouTube and Facebook. I was grateful the images weren't those of Muhammad; no fatwa requiring my execution would be declared. Then I gently scooped Jesus out of the bowl, placed him inside a rectangular glass storage container, covered it with its silicone seal, and put it in the refrigerator. Atheist or not, I couldn't flush Him.

A week later, on Monday night, I had an epiphany while watching a comedian on television hold up a photo of my turd and say, "A Robert Shapiro of West Hartford, Connecticut

had a bowel movement that looked like Jesus Christ. Is this for real? It looks like Jesus was in the rectum instead of the rectory.” It was for real, but it didn’t have to be. I could have sculpted him. I turned off the television and squeezed out my second movement of the day. I placed it on a plastic board and with gloved hands tried to sculpt Kim Kardashian. The stool lacked the right consistency and refused to maintain the shape in which I cast it.

Tuesday through Friday night, I returned from work, took a shit, and tried to shape it into Kardashian. I discovered through trial and error that I could attain the proper consistency of my feces by eating the right amounts of brown rice, whole grain bread, black beans, and other high fiber foods. On Saturday, the sixth day, I created her, encased her in a sealed acrylic cylinder, and uploaded pictures of it to YouTube and Facebook. On Sunday, the seventh day, I rested.

Ten days later I was telephoned by a man who said, “Hello. My name’s Bill Bogs. I write the Bill Bogs’ Blog of Sports and Contemporary Art.” His was the go-to site for what was fresh in those spheres. He told me he had seen my Jesus and my Kardashian and asked whether I had sculpted Christ.

I said, “One might argue defecation is an act of creation, but I didn’t sculpt Him, unless you count the constriction and relaxation of my sphincter as sculpting.”

“So, Jesus was a freak occurrence, what some might call a miracle, and you think of Kardashian as a form of art?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Art from defecation?”

In the spur of the moment, I said, “I call it poop art,” plucking the appellation out of my ass.

The next day, Bill Bogs' Blog of Sports and Contemporary Art featured a story captioned, "Poop Art: Is It Shit?" after another titled, "Third Baseman Steals Second: Charged with Misdemeanor." In the former article, Bogs transcribed our conversation and added, "Move over pop art, spread your 'p's and insert an 'o,' poop art is here to stay. It blurs the boundaries between 'high' art and 'low' culture not only by creating sculptures of mass culture objects, but also by using poop as the substance of its art. Then Bogs discussed the many materials that have been used to sculpt, such as clay, pottery, metal, plaster of Paris, wax, and wood. He concluded maybe it wasn't odd that a natural substance, like poop, be used. He linked to my YouTube postings of Christ and Kardashian and my Facebook site.

In response to Bogs' blog, I received numerous calls. Several people wanted to purchase my Kardashian and my Christ. After a bidding war, Joe Prichard and I settled on a price of ten thousand dollars for the Kardashian, and Umar Moghul paid twenty thousand for Christ. Considering it took six days with three meals a day to cast Kardashian and each meal couldn't have cost more than ten dollars, I netted a tidy profit of at least nine thousand eight hundred twenty, excluding the cost of time spent. I considered as profit the entire twenty thousand I received for Jesus.

Dozens of others requested I send photos of my other poop sculptures that were available for sale. To meet demand, I ate more, doubling and tripling my food intake. A week later my weight had ballooned from one hundred fifty to one hundred sixty-six pounds, but I had only defecated an extra three times. On average it took three bowel movements to produce a decent sculpture, and so by week's end I had finished only three pieces, the Jennifer's, Lopez, Lawrence, and Aniston, each of which sold for ten thousand dollars.

I didn't know how I could make more art without eating myself to death, and then I had another epiphany. For years artists had been issuing signed limited-edition series of their original oil paintings with or without embellishment by studio artists. Much of their work was printed on posters, serigraphs on paper and canvas, canvas lithographs and transfers, giclees on canvas, serio-lithographs, and textured giclees. Like my law firm, where the partner brings in the business and the associates do the work, they used leverage to make a buck. After realizing the poop sculptures would still be my creation regardless of whether someone else created the poop, I convinced my parents to shit in a bucket, which I collected on my way home from work. With the assistance of my family, I was able to produce seven sculptures a week. I sold a Clooney, a Pitt, an Affleck, a Johansson, a Shelton, an Aquilera, and an Usher, among others.

Then I read an article about ancient Greek and Roman marble sculptures. It said they are white only because the paint faded away with time. I had scrupulously selected only brown feces so my pieces would resemble bronze sculptures. Now I was determined to simultaneously give color to my work and increase my stool supply by hiring additional shitters.

I placed advertisements on Craigslist and hired six groups of people, three in each group. One group ate only yellow foods, such as bananas, mangos, and peaches. Another ate green in the form of broccoli, asparagus, and Brussel sprouts. Red/purple foods, like apples, plums, and pomegranates, were eaten by the third group; apricots, cantaloupe, carrots, and other orange foods by the fourth; and ginger, onions, Lemongrasses, and other white foods by the fifth. The sixth group ate blue/black foods, such as blueberries, black potatoes, and black cabbage. After each successive ten-day period, each group ate a new food color, and when all were eaten, the process began again. My goal was to create a lot of different colored shit, while minimizing the risk my employees would have an unbalanced diet.

I quit my job and worked day and night to produce seven poop sculptures daily from the stool of my family and the new hires. By mixing the primary colors of yellow, red, and blue and the secondary colors of orange, purple, and green, I could create all the tertiary colors, the combinations of which provided me with an endless variety of hues, tints, tones, and shades.

Soon Beyonce stood within her cylinder on a red carpet in a skin-tight sheer dress with magenta, lime, turquoise, and peridot sparkles over her shoulders, sides, and private parts. Rihanna lay on her stomach in a Persian rose leotard with cut outs along her thighs and the top of her buttocks. Tom Brady, still a Patriot no matter the team he quarterbacks for, stood tall, football raised and ready to be passed. His flesh shown tan with whitish hues where it wasn't covered by his blue inner shirt and his red jersey emblazoned with his white number twelve. True to life, he had blue eyes and brown hair. As a nod to Warhol, I created the Campbell's soup can and a portrait of Marilyn. I sculpted any object that came to mind: dishes, glasses, underwear, ties, shirts, fruits, hangers, cars, and bicycles. When I was tired, I sculpted hamburgers and meatballs. If I needed to quickly fill my daily quota of created art, I crafted the shit as turds.

My sculptures continued to sell like real estate in a bubble the moment before it bursts. Although a dozen or so poop artists had surfaced and copied my work, I was the Andy Warhol of the medium, and my work was the most sought after. Sculptures I cast from my stool commanded twice the price of sculptures I made from the shit of others, and the latter were still more valuable than comparable pieces sculpted by other poop artists regardless of whether they used their own.

I opened poop art galleries in Manhattan, Beverly Hills, London, Paris, and Milan. To provide them with product to sell, I hired more shitters and employed sculptors to cast their

additional shit. If I certified they crafted the sculptures under my guidance, they sold for the same prices comparable pieces sculpted by other poop artists commanded.

For two years I was swimming in money, but sales slowed, and I knew something was amiss. I found the answer when I searched past entries in Bill Bogs' Blog of Sports and Contemporary Art. Three weeks earlier it had featured a story captioned, "Poop Art: It's #2," after another titled, "Quarterback's Pass Incomplete: Sued for Sexual Harassment." In the former story, Bogs said, "Piss on poop art. Why buy art that's #2 when you can have art that's also #1? That's right, piss and poop art is here. Check out Gerald McSweeney's work: a replica of the Bellagio frontage cast in poop with a waterfront of urine from which fountains of piss spurt skyward; a reproduction of the Tap Fountain in Menorca, Spain from which piss flows into a basin of urine from a faucet made of shit suspended in mid-air; and the Excreters in which male and female torsos made of poop are suspended side by side, with urine flowing from their genitals and feces hanging from their buttocks." He linked to McSweeney's YouTube postings of art and McSweeney's Facebook site.

I added piss to my poop art to spur sales at my galleries. I sculpted poop bathtubs and pools filled with urine, poop clouds bursting with piss, the Venice canals, and so many others. These works sold for much lower prices than comparable pieces of other piss and poop artists, and there was little demand for my poop sculptures. I had to fire my shitters and sculptors. I spent all the money I had earned and closed my galleries. I was back to where I was before Jesus Christ plopped out of my ass, except I no longer had a job.

Three months later, I lingered forlorn on the toilet, stuck in place, bemoaning my lost fame and fortune and the relentless depression and inability to function that replaced it. It was much easier not knowing success than to have had it turn to failure.

I spread my legs and looked in the bowl. Every time I'd taken a dump after I excreted Jesus, my stools had been ordinary. I stared at these feces and thought about the sculptures I could create from them. I blinked several times and refocused. There was something special about this movement. The three pieces were side by side in the shape of a triangle, the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet called the delta, which denotes change of any changeable quantity in mathematics and the sciences.

I had a moment of clarity. I rose, knowing I could change my life only if I wiped, flushed, pulled up my pants, and did something.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *The genesis of Holy Crap, Kim Kardashian, and Other Movements was an internet article that mentioned odd places on which the image of Christ was discovered. The article was the catalyst for my protagonist's discovery of Christ on the cross in his feces. With that discovery as the beginning of the story, the story wrote itself into a satire on religion, contemporary art, celebrity, sports, and consumerism.*

*I've written fiction that is literary, speculative, satire, absurdist, dark, horror, religious/spiritual, and experimental. Early literary influences, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Graham Greene, Herman Hesse, Dostoevsky, Kafka, John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip Roth, Henry Miller, and John Updike, showed me the beauty, enchantment, and significance of words set forth in the right combination. Reading these great authors and others made me want to write.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Kenneth Levine's fiction is featured or will be forthcoming in New Plains Review, Maryland Literary Review, Heart of Flesh Literary Journal, Crooked Teeth Literary Magazine, Anak Sastra, Thuglit, Imaginaire, Skewed Lit, Angry Old Man Magazine, Jerry Jazz Musician, and anthologies titled Fresh, Twisted, and Dark Secrets. He is the winner of a Jerry Jazz Musician short story contest and the featured writer in an Anak Sastra issue.