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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
The College Of Imaging Art and Sciences in candidacy for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Title

A Search Into Time, History and Relevance
Clay/Steel/Fiberglass

By Brad Spencer

Approvals

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Date: 11/21/03

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Introduction

Central to this work is the metaphor of history and the relationship of humankind to its tools. My thesis investigation deals with old and new surfaces making reference to tools. I am fascinated with the object that was previously used, the history it carries with it, the texture of use and age, and its continued relevance.

In *A Search Into Time, History and Relevance; Clay/Steel/Fiberglass*, you will learn how studying history and my travels through out Italy and Europe looking at ancient ruins contrasted to or with modern architectural buildings has been a strong influence in defining my direction. I have chosen to combine classical proportions with taken out of context abstracted forms referencing tools and a past tied to the present.

The educational aspect of this thesis includes the real life situations and personal processes of finding locations and the procedures leading to final installation. This included gathering resources needed to complete, install and publicize the finished sculptures.

Newspaper articles, published work, television coverage and lectures helped in communicating my ideas and the completed work to the public. Part of what was learned about public notice of your work is one's obligation to understand and be able to speak about the idea in a scholarly way in order to communicate with your audience. When working in the studio a dialog develops between yourself and the idea. At this point communication is not directed towards an outward dialog with a audience-it is with yourself. A dialog begins with an audience when you place the finished work in the public eye. After a sculpture has been installed in a public setting a dialog evolves with the public viewer. Once the sculpture is removed from the studio were a dialog with myself created the work a new dialog continues when the piece is viewed by the public in a public setting. Now, it is very enriching to inform the public of your work. Both in a scholarly and conversational way. It takes insight to see how enriching this is.

A Search Into Time, History and Relevance; Clay/Steel/Fiberglass begins with historical background, the inspiration for my sculptures, and continues with how I developed this idea for the body of work. It is followed by a description and definition of my intent and chosen direction. The method, process and procedures of construction, fabrication and installation are then discussed. Next addressed is what was learned technically in order to install and complete successful sculptures. Ways in which my sculptures received public recognition and attention in the press are contained throughout the various sections.

Appendix A, "From River Bank to Tower, Brad Spencer, Clay/Steel/Fiberglass," contains photos of my work, critical reviews by Robert C. Morgan, Roslyn Bakst Goldman and Richard Hirsch, and a brief bibliography. The scholarly work "From River Bank to Tower, Brad Spencer, Clay/Steel/Fiberglass" was accepted into the United States Library of Congress as a published work documenting this body of work for public reference. It has also become tangible documentation of the end results of my thesis work.

It was stated in my thesis proposal "My intentions are to create large scale clay and metal sculptures for public and corporate locations in Rochester." This goal was accomplished. Although not a requirement of my proposal a decision was made to show these works and or photos, depending on size in one setting- the traditional thesis show. My thesis show held in the Bevier Gallery represented a body of sculptures. These sculptures illustrate my idea of old and new, looking at history as metaphor, continued relevance and making reference to tools. Four of these sculptures ranging from a twenty foot tall out-door piece to several four foot tall inside works had been commissioned for site specific locations.

The notion of accomplishing, by myself, this body of work in a grand scale would not be an accurate assessment. The value of successfully communicating ones ideas to others who perform the labor and the importance of working with others out side the studio were lessons learned. It is important to thank all those who helped me in achieving the goals I set out to accomplish.

Historical References

The unfamiliarity of the past fascinates me. Looking at everyday objects from the past helps construct a picture of what the past held. By making a connection with the past I feel a greater connection to the present and future. What fascinates me most about studying the past is the urge to ask questions. You can not look at some object without wondering who touched it, what was its value, what was it used for etc.. Then realizing that this object was used and has all this history to it shown through it's surface texture and patina. That is so overwhelming.

Past and Present

“ Analogies between the present and the past have been drawn since the earliest days of archaeology. The realization in the 17th century that ancient stone tools were indeed human artefact was largely due to observation, in the newly discovered Americas, of the native Indians using similar tools. By the 19th century, direct comparisons were being made between ancient peoples contemporary groups such as the Australian aborigines, who were looked on as surviving relics of Paleolithic life.”(McIntosh 152)

The idea of combining old and new appeals to me for several reasons. By incorporating the past into the present we remember the past. This fusion of time tells a story of continued relevance.

An ancient Etruscans hand pick that was first observed in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto lead to my interest in the patina of age, time and relevance of use. You see, a run in with the little known world of the Etruscans a few years before while completing an apprenticeship in Todi, Italy had occurred. “Etruscans, whose origin is still unknown, have been successively assigned to all races and countries. They have been described as indigenous Italians, Slavs, Basques, Celts, Canaanites, Armenians, Egyptians, Tartars, etc.” (Massa 5) This inability to identify their past intrigued me greatly. We can find their objects and tools that once were

used and view them in museums, but that usage and significance to their

society has long been gone. Its principles are stated in terms of a vanished civilization. The very names of objects and tools that once were used have become doubtful. What was found appealing is that usage had now become important to me as a connection to the past. The hand pick with its aged surface, discolored metal and gouged texture had a previous usage. It was used and in that aspect it became relevant to the idea of past usage and how usage could be shown in surface texture. When a tool or object is used the act of usage or work can be seen on the surface of the material of which the object is made out of.

As well the archeological significance of tools as a primary source of information about every man was intriguing. The fact that someone previously used or depended on a particular object such as a hand pick has meaning. A historical relevance that carries with it a connection to the past.

Towards the end of my first year of graduate school a Scottsville, New York resident brought to me what he believed was an old farming implement blade. It might have been a part of a tiller or plow, he wasn't exactly sure. To me it looked as if it had been broken off some tilling implement used long ago. Wanting to know where the object was found, my question was asked bluntly. Turns out this old rusted, incredibly patina piece of iron, was unearthed in a nearby field. This previously used object that no longer had a function carried great interest. Even the shape which had chipped edges and apparently broken sides told a story of time and relevance. The form taken out of context with its function and connection to a farming implement looked abstract and foreign. This object obviously referenced a past history and made historical references to a past in its surface texture and detail just as the Etruscan hand pick had done.

Research developed into studying other hand and farming related tools from different time periods. A book that was useful in my search to look at older tools was a 1902 Edition of The Sears, Roebuck Catalogue. This reprinted catalogue gave me a visual image of an era gone. I looked at different types of picks from railroad picks, drifting picks, common eye

coal picks, adze eye coal picks, miners' short ear cutting picks, miners' short ear mining picks, poll picks, pick mattocks and stone picks. They all have specific names for a specific use. There are hundreds of different types and shapes of adz and picks. Some types have a single cutting edge

with the rear side of the head formed into a hammer like shape or a pick-like tool. Other types have a head with two identical shapes back to back. Variations both in form and material on the tools researched were noticed. There is also two different spellings of adz or adze are used.

Many other types and styles of picks, adzes and Mattocks were found all with specific names like: railroad adz, carpenter's adz, ship carpenter's adz, pick/mattock, pickax, English adze, Scotch adze, American adze, Cooper adze, line adze and Korean adze. The Circle of Mechanical Arts, 1813; Holtzapffel, 1846; Knight's Mechanical Dictionary, 1878; and Webster, 1951 illustrate particular variations and shapes of adzes.

A decision was made to show these old objects' past history through patina and surface texture. The tool is only known as a tool by the name placed on it. If an object has long been forgotten its usage can become no longer relevant. An objects past is however visible in its surface nuances, patina and texture of material. Just like an artifact viewed in a museum has incredible value for its age and place in history. The fact that it was used by man adds incredible significance and value to the object. Usage and age can tell a story through surface texture. The viewer, through their personal experiences, finds age and implied usage through surface texture signigfiate. Learn more about the significance of juxtaposing old and new and the idea of relevance and past usage in Defining My Direction sub heading *Surface of A Search Into Time, History and Relevance; Clay/Steel/Fiberglass* .

The exact purpose of the tools use was not important, but that the tools had served a function and had a past usage. It was the patina of use and age juxtaposed to a material alluding to modern that captivated my research and interest.

Defining My Direction

When starting graduate school a feeling that there were better things within me than what had been made up to this point existed. These feelings made me wonder, gave me energy and ideas to do the next work. Before attending graduate school I had studied in Italy and traveled extensively through the country. After my apprenticeship in Italy time was spent traveling through Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. One of the things that really influences me is travel. It has to do with observation of what is around me. The freshness and vitality that comes from viewing and experiencing the world through different cultural perspectives gives me pleasure.

Traveling to Italy my study concentrated on ceramic sculpture and investigating Italian ceramics in Faenza. After studying at the National Institute of Ceramic Arts, my apprenticeship began in Todi, Italy with Italian master Nino Caruso, who accepted me as his first American apprentice. The history and wealth of visual information accumulated during this period was incredible. I was ready to express new ideas and take them to a visual form.

Old objects are truly my passion. While in Germany that same year, I always went to the archaeology museums. In these museums ancient forms could be found and the history surrounding them was learned. There is something timeless, spiritual, and rich about the forms studied—they are very human. Human in the sense that these objects had relevance and their age is a reflection of and connection to the past. I wanted to make a connection with that history and add to it by bringing it into the future.

These observations and experiences have had a strong impact on defining my direction. This fascination with history as metaphor has given me a sense of how history and form can be used to evoke a feeling of timelessness.

My approach has been very basic. I think of an idea and then exercise my

mind, by thinking how to construct it. The material, the form, the size, all these components are considered at the same time. When I have successfully chosen all these elements and put them into one unifying composition my ideas can be best expressed.

When working in the studio, a dialog devolves within myself. And, the outcome is the work. Intending to satisfy my interest by expressing an idea in material form, and displaying it in the public eye, I end up communicating with the public. But, it is not my intention to do so.

It has been noticed, that some people make a big issue out of what other people think about their work, but for me it is a private cause in the studio. If you care too much it affects what you do ultimately. Having a sense of where you want it to go is personally satisfying. You shape the way the work is created, developed and take the risk for creative artistic stimulation. There is only one way and that is to do it yourself. So that you can be proud of the body of work put together.

Some people have the need not only to express their idea to everyone but also to explain and promote. If you are confident in your work and idea it doesn't matter what other people think. What matters is that they look at the work and question it. Now you have their interest. By questioning the sculptures they are viewing, the viewer is connecting, understanding and digesting the work based on their experiences. This outlook may have to do with my travels and interest in seeing and experiencing other cultural images. I am looking outward - not inward when traveling. Trying not to relate to another culture but rather experiencing it and through this trying to form an understanding.

The ideas being developed and end up expressed through choice of material, form and scale and surface texture are reflections of my experiences and interest, an outward expression of time and relevance, history and form.

Material

Previously, to my way of thinking, process was totally separate from the

idea and the feeling. Process was what followed the idea. This was my experience from an early taught pottery background. Now there is a feeling that process is one with the idea. Finding the best process and material for the idea is the same as the creative process for the idea. Why? Even similar types of sculpture within a body of work demand slightly different techniques to best serve the idea. These different techniques can later be read in the technical section of *A Search Into Time, History and Relevance; Clay/Steel/Fiberglass*. In this section different technical aspects of planning, construction and fabrication are broken down into subjects and discussed.

My interest in material and form lead me to Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi. From Brancusi, the nature of sculptural materials, and the simplicity of boiling an idea down to its essence, which is abstraction was learned. Brancusi, "Courtied the finish of machine-made industrial products" and he "delighted in the beauty and severity of mechanically functional shapes." (Krauss, 99-100). At the same time he placed these polished shapes on roughly textured pedestals creating this wonderful contrast of time and history. This was the contrast discovered in parts of Europe while looking at new and ancient architecture.

Understanding the material is my intent. I want to know the best usage of a material and more importantly which is the best material for the idea. Understanding my materials allows choosing the best material for the idea. Testing, researching and pushing the boundaries of different types of material creates a knowledge of what the material has to offer. Knowing what the material can do and can't do or be made to look like allows a closer connection between the idea and the material.

Broken clay forms can be as strong aesthetically as the original. That is a possibility of material never considered, and would be used later to make new forms that looked as if they were broken long ago. As you have probably read the Historical Reference section of *A Search Into Time, History and Relevance; Clay/Steel/Fiberglass* the discovery of a broken farming implement blade was talked about. This broken artefact contained a great historical presence and interest. A connection was developing.

In a way, my attitude toward clay had been limited. The idea of creating

something new by breaking an existing form and reassembling it was somewhat of an incredulity.

Choosing the right material puts an interesting level of creative freedom in my hands. There is nothing between the idea, and the material. I don't want to see or feel conflict with the material and the idea. My goal is to merge technique, the material and the idea into one, so there is no distance between them.

When dealing with an idea, I am at the same time thinking of the material and how it can represent the idea in form.

Form and Scale

I want to make things that arouse my curiosity. The forms of old previously used tools are interesting in that the form or shape carries so much history and meaning. When looking at tools that once had a function, I love to think of how to show their relevance in a new way by changing or adding to the form. This is done by exaggerating or isolating a specific spot of the whole tool—sometimes combining many tools into one creating an abstracted form. Yet, taken out of context most tool forms are abstract by nature. You may know what the tool might have been used for and how it was used, but for me that is not what is important. I will change the form to suit my needs, because I want the message of age and usage to carry over, usually through the surface details created.

This creates new ideas and thus brings more questions and more curiosity to the original idea. This is how my creative energy expands. Each tool form makes me think of new ideas and different shapes. I try to orchestrate these ideas as part of a whole.

Time was spent studying certain tools and what the shape may mean in terms of its connection to form and usage. A tool whose form I found interesting is the hand pick. There are many shapes, sizes and forms of picks, each with its own name and function.

Before coming to a decision to make my work large scale, I asked myself

why make such large scale objects. I concluded that my awareness of scale is closely tied with form and environment. My ideas about scale and decisions about how to use scale revolved around comparison. What do I mean by comparison? If everything was the same size, we would never have a feeling of scale. Scale offsets things and makes us have different emotions.

Being interested in the contrast of scale, research started in the direction of looking into the architectural structures I.M. Pei had built around the world. Some of Pei's work incorporated new structures with old structures. Of particular interest was how Pei integrated his structure with its surrounding environment in terms of placement and scale.

When looking up to a tall person I feel differently than when looking down at a short person. When looking up at a tall building or looking down at a small flower I feel similarly. This feeling was and has been an important part of the question of scale. The decision to build large scale is done for specific reasons with consideration of the surrounding environment.

These feelings of scale are primarily based on the surrounding sizes and other influences of the environment in which the form is placed. In making my maquettes problems of scale had to be faced. I started with small forms, about 9 inches high, but generally my scale was about three to four feet. I believe each form has one right scale in its specific setting and determining that scale correctly allows the form to succeed or fail.

Surface

After experimentation I found I had to score or gouge the surface of clay to create texture and add another level of interest. It is difficult to leave the surface smooth. This may be a reaction from my early experiences throwing pots that dictated smooth clean surfaces covered by thick shiny glaze. A silica glaze just covers the form and all surface texture. That just would not work.

The gouges, marks and any other texture left on the clays surface contribute a great deal to the tonality of the finished work. Having the

ability to orchestrate the different texture of marks and spaces in any given area of the form is important. Not being concerned to much with pattern the marks are random. My approach to the placement of surface texture is arbitrary and intuitive. Much the same as when viewing ancient ruins in Europe randomly left next to modern structures.

Certain visual and tactile qualities are appealing: the juxtaposition of warm and cold surfaces, the patina of age and surface nuances. For me these characteristics imply age and a sense of timelessness—a past and a future tied together.

Using two types of materials with contrasting surface texture, this idea was explored with the many models being developed. Placing polished metal elements with roughly worked primitive or aged looking clay elements, time passage and history could be expressed with tremendous contrast. In doing so, the way in which the decision was made to display and arrange these elements allowed me to convey the idea of relevance and past usage.

While studying arrangement, looking again at the works of both Brancusi and Isamu Noguchi for their conceptualization and use of weightlessness. Noguchi apprenticed with Brancusi. I wanted to study Nogouchi and understand his reasons for apprenticing with Brancusi. I learned how to use the visualization of weightlessness and movement—not the action of weightlessness and movement.

So, I started to think about material, form, scale and surface as one movement. When a piece is finished, I hope all these things have been brought together into a complete composition.

Intent

My aim was to clearly define and stake out the parameters as discussed in the previous section and the process used to explore and state this theme. You see, my intent has always been clear, straight forward and to the point. By applying the defined guidelines, a body of work would be created.

My thesis proposal written towards the latter end of the first year of graduate school stated: "My intentions are to create large scale clay and metal sculptures for public and corporate locations in Rochester. I will be continuing my investigation dealing with tool forms in large scale. I am interested in the metaphor of history, and how humans have used tools and different ways that I can display them. I would like to allude to age of the tool by the surface treatment, texture of the clay and metal. The clay elements will be made to look as if they were found, or previously made. They will be juxtaposed to modern elements that are either framing, surrounding or piercing the tool form.

The educational aspect of this thesis will include the real life situations and personal processes of finding a location and the procedures leading to final installation. This includes gathering resources needed to complete, install and publicize the finished work; as well as dealing with town regulations and building permits required for installations." The thesis committee advisors in September of 1998 approved the proposal and the wheels were set in motion. Right then a commitment was made to succeed at successfully fulfilling these stated intentions.

Energy was directed towards expanding the amount of time needed to spend creating new models. Every new model was an answer to the theme being explored. (See illustration, appendix A, page 16 and 19)

A goal was to have my work to be seen in public spaces. I asked myself, what is the reason that public and private spaces should incorporate art? Bill Rosenthal, President of Ziff-Davis Education (now Element K),

reflected my conclusions, when he was interviewed by Builder/Architect magazine about his reasons for commissioning my 20 foot tall fiberglass and stainless steel sculpture, entitled ADZ\PICK. Rosenthal said, "Many office parks are full of buildings that all look alike and grounds with little to distinguish one space from another. By placing the sculpture outside, it creates a unique visual element to distinguish our building, and the sculpture can be enjoyed by anyone at any time, not just those who enter the building." (Evans16)

I looked to have my sculpture installed in permanent locations and visible to an every changing audience. After the installation of two clay and stainless steel wall sculptures entitled PLW\SHN in the upper level of the high school media center, Principal Peter Knapp was quoted in the *Brighton News* as saying, "It's a very thought-provoking piece of art, and I think it fits the school very well." (Press 2). As I was quoted saying, "I hope that this sculpture will encourage students to continue their educational and artistic pursuits." (Press 2).

Just as hoped, my sculptures were recognized by the media. In an article on my sculptures, *Democrat and Chronicle* staff writer Matt Leingang said, "As Brad Spencer becomes more prolific, his creations are becoming more recognizable." (1F).

My intent was to have my work seen by the public. "You can't be a recluse and expect people to know you and come to you," said Rochester Institute of Technology Bob Barbato quoted from a newspaper article on Brad Spencer's sculptures. "Spencer appears to be on the right track," (Sopko, 3F) Barbato said.

The importance of building models allowed me to continually work with the idea and concept of history as metaphor. J. Leslie Sopko writes, "Brad Spencer is far more interested in designing his dramatic outdoor sculptures than in thinking of ways to market them." (3F). Her newspaper article brought to light the efforts involved in planning, creating and installing sculpture to be seen by the public. These type of newspaper articles allow the artist an opportunity to speak about his or her work, and communicate with a public viewer in a beneficial way to understanding the processes.

Methodology

The process of defining my direction began by sketching on paper followed by many variations of small clay and steel maquettes. There were several reasons why a decision was made to work in a model size of seven to eighteen inches in height. The maquettes allowed me a three dimensional form to work out larger sculptural considerations in the planning process. The second and most realistic reason is cost. Every step after the development of the model must be planned. Planning was the key to a successful installation. Many details were carefully considered at the model scale, because details are multiplied many times at a larger scale.

A process was decided on which conveyed the surface qualities to which I was drawn. I looked for and decided on a process that fit with my idea. Information about a past history, usage, and time was represented in the surface texture of the materials which I chose to use through process. A relationship between the idea and the way the sculpture was made was created.

This method of approach that was created, of building a sculpture by unifying both idea and material, was talked about in Defining My Direction section of *A Search Into Time, History and Relevance; Clay/Steel/Fiberglass*. The material, the form, the size, and any other components are considered at the same time as the idea. Process is one with the idea. So, now in the Methodology section of *A Search Into Time, History and Relevance; Clay/Steel/Fiberglass* you can learn how it was applied.

The process, both planning and construction, is an important aspect to my work. The steps taken and the methods used to fabricate and construct my sculptures are essential to the work, and I am fascinated with the best way to make and represent my ideas. Finally, though, process is subservient to the appearance of the finished piece.

The first forms of clay were fabricated from plaster press molds, to

simulate a cast look, a feeling of production. The surface treatment and texture of all the materials used allude to age. In collecting information about history and time in surface nuances, I defined what is primitive and what is contemporary by manipulating the materials appearance.

I learned that, every step after the development of the model must be planned and many details must be carefully considered. These details are later laid out in Aspects of Planning and Technical sections of *A Search Into Time, History and Relevance*; Clay/Steel/Fiberglass.

In the case of the sculpture ADZ\PICK realization that I alone could not fabricate and install a large 20 foot tall sculpture lead me to depend on others for their provided labor and help. (See illustrations, appendix A, page 13 and 14) In a *Democrat and Chronicle* article , *Shaping a Name for Himself*, business writer J. Leslie Sopko said, "He also learned from a master, Wendell Castle, that you must choose subcontractors who can meet deadlines and interpret the artist's designs accurately." (Sopko 3F)

Relevance of Title to the Sculpture

The choice to title all my sculptures was because the title is part of the work. Leaving a finished work untitled seems to be a step towards less communication with your viewer and less expression of the idea. It has been noticed that when someone views a work their next step is to look at the title hoping to make some sort of further connection to the piece.

The titles created usually make reference to tools. How? This is the connection to tools-answering that there was use and what the usage may have been. The assumption of function is only through the works title- use can be seen in the surface texture and patina of the material.

After the sculptures are completed the title is thought out and chosen. Some parents have names picked out for their child before the child is born and some wait until they can see the newborns character and then decided on the name. If you choose to look at it in this respect my method for titling the sculpture is the latter. Much time is spent on deciding a title, thinking how the title may be interpreted by the viewer and how that

interpretation can be controlled in some respect. It was not at all uncommon to run titles by friends and listen to their reaction and interpretation of the title to the work.

Aspects of Planning

The ability to plan each step of the process and realize what to expect as an outcome, was an asset. Developing an outline and following it to meet my goals was essential. Planning and organizing the resources, people, and equipment is very important for a successful completion. Careful and extensive research into methods and process can save time, money and disappointment.

Here is what was involved in the learning process of planning the method for the sculptures ADZ\PICK, PLW\SHN, Chisel\Spike, Chisel\Spike II and ONE.

ADZ\PICK

Each step of the construction for the twenty foot tall fiberglass and stainless steel sculpture ADZ\PICK needed to be organized and planned. You can not do everything yourself. So you have to find people you can work with. (See, appendix A, page 5, Morgan Paragraph 7)

The planned large scale sculpture of ADZ\PICK, required hiring subcontractors to perform the needed labor. No one person would be able to construct, fabricate and install the sculpture alone. (See illustration, appendix A, page 13 and 14)

A break down of the steps involved in the planning, construction/fabrication and installation of ADZ\PICK are detailed here:

- Started with idea
- Presented idea with a sketch to CEO of commissioning organization
- Decided on the best materials to express the idea and that would hold up to an environment the sculpture would be placed into

- Surveyed and studied proposed site placement
- Many models made-one chosen
- Scale calculations determined
- Sculpture placement determined after checking where drainage routes and sewage lines are, building a full size wooden model to help in determining placement of sculpture to the surrounding buildings and trees and consulting a mason for fabrication and pouring of the concrete pad
- Cutting, shaping and carving blue styrofoam
- Consulted with riggers to transport and install sculpture
- Consulted with steel fabricators on fabrication of the stainless steel elements
- Consulted with photographer to document delivery and installation
- Research and testing of adding a color mix to concrete pad
- Large fiberglass reenforced plaster press mold made from blue foam form
- Reenforced concrete pad poured with colorant and texture added to finish
- Eight hundred pounds of clay pressed into fiberglass reenforced mold
- Polyurethane vacuum glove mold made for fiberglass castings
- Research and experimentation with patina variations on fiberglass
- Color of fiberglass chosen and cast into four sections
- Cast fiberglass sections epoxied together
- Desired patina applied on fiberglass surface and sealed
- Delivery of fiberglass form to steel fabricators
- Bronze name plaque ordered
- Stainless steel elements welded around fiberglass form
- Riggers transport and install sculpture
- Photographer documented process
- Hilti Corporation install epoxy anchoring system
- Democrat and Chronicle reporter at installation

A mason was needed to construct and pour the twelve foot by twelve foot ten inch thick charcoal colored concrete pad to anchor the sculpture on. After interviewing a half of dozen masons for the job only one was found I could place my confidence in, work with and construct the concrete pad.

ADZ\PICK's fabrication was done at a total of three different locations during the construction process. The sculpture was assembled and ready for transportation to the installation site at a forth location were the stainless steel frame had been fabricated around the completed fiberglass form.

The weeks leading up to installation of course without surprise required planning and organizing all parties involved in the installation. The steel fabrication shop had to be ready for the riggers and their sixteen wheel flat bed trailer rig. The photographers had to know the itinerary for the day and be ready. A Hilti Corporation representative who would install the anchoring system had to also be ready.

The weather was the biggest unknown factor, which would determine whether to install or call everything off to another day. Installing ADZ\PICK another day was not an option to consider. If there was a snow storm then it would be another day, week or month. The weather in Rochester, NY as you may know is unpredictable and changes in extremes weekly sometimes daily. Another day would mean reorganizing all the parties involved. It would not be possible to fit everyone's schedule together and do the installation in the following day to come.

PLW\SHN

The public commissioned wall sculptures PLW\SHN were permanently installed in Brighton High Schools two story media center in February of 1999. The location of the clay and stainless steel sculptures are on either side of a large glass pane window over a two story spiral stairwell.

A break down of the steps involved in the planning, construction/fabrication, installation and presented lecture of PLW\SHN are detailed here:

- Started with idea for sculpture
- Presented idea to School District with a clay and steel maquette
- Placement sites reviewed with school facilitator
- Consulted with school and engineers on safety issues

- Media Center chosen for site of sculptures
- Computer rendering created of sculpture and location for formal proposal presentation
- Scale calculations were determined
- Fabrication of clay and stainless steel sculptures began
- Bronze name plaque ordered
- Plans for lecture to be given to students, and the community about the sculptures made with school officials
- Sculptures installed with the help of school workers
- Brighton-Pittsford post newspaper documented installation
- Catered reception was held to formally present the permanently installed sculptures
- Granted interview to News channel 10 NBC and 31 Fox
- Invited as guest lecturer at Brighton High School to speaking with art students and community members about the idea, creation and installation of the work
- News channel R New broadcasted lecture to the public

This commission first started with meetings and discussions on safety issues between the school principal. After weeks of researching three proposed locations within the High School the media center was selected. The location was suited for these sculptures. My work which deals with history, time and use were best suited in a library where students learn in an environment filled with history and reference material.

Small clay and steel models of the planned sculptures had been made. After photographing the desired location in the media center and photographing the model a digital rendering of how the sculptures would look in the media center was created. The creation of these digital renderings was a great tool to realistically show how the sculptures would look within the school.

There was much consideration and planning around safety issues, both of installing the works and safety issues of students' interaction with the sculptures. The sculptures would be placed where they could not be touched by students. Concerns of vandalism or students hanging from the sculptures were addressed. As well as addressing the weight of the pieces and how they would be anchored to stay safely on the wall. No one wants

these pieces falling off the wall. A unique anchoring system was developed to hold the sculptures to the wall.

A formal lecture was presented in the media center to art students and the community. Interaction with students and the community is always an important aspect to public commissions.

Chisel\Spike

The commissioned clay and stainless steel sculpture Chisel\Spike was proposed to Hammer Lithograph Corp. a year before it was installed.

A break down of the steps involved in the planning, construction/fabrication and installation Chisel\Spike are detailed here:

- Started with idea for sculpture
- Verbally presented idea to CEO and President of the company
- Consulted with CEO and President on yet to be built lobby at new facility location
- Time-line for installation agreed upon
- Viewed partially completed lobby to determine scale and placement
- Fabrication of clay and stainless steel sculpture begun
- Stainless steel name plaque ordered
- Painted wooden display pedestal fabricated
- Sculpture delivered and placed in lobby

Much time was spent meeting with the CEO and President of the company and was involved in seeing the new lobby being built where this piece was going. Knowing this lobby's environment and scale, allowed me to find the correct size for the sculptures placement.

Chisel\Spike II

Chisel\Spike II is one of a series of sculptures worked on. (See illustration, appendix A, page 15) Its construction and fabrication was much the same as Chisel\Spike. After its showing in the Bevier Gallery

Chisel\Spike II was placed on indefinite loan to the Town of Brighton in Rochester, New York at the request of the Town Supervisor. The sculpture was placed in the main lobby of the Town Hall where it could be viewed by the visiting public.

ONE

This clay and stainless steel sculpture was commissioned by Unisys Corporation for their main lobby in its Farmington, New York office building. Due to financial and profit-loss considerations the company was unable to complete the commission.

A break down of the steps involved in the planning and construction/fabrication of ONE are detailed here:

- Started with idea for sculpture
- Verbally presented idea to local management of the company
- Model made from clay and steel
- Submitted computer rendering made from a photo of the model and lobby and a written formal proposal
- Time line for an installation agreed upon
- Company having financial problems
- Sculpture completed
- A photograph appeared in RIT News and Events paper showing myself sharing this work with artist Nancy Jurs, Leonard Urso, metals professor and Wendell Castle during the School for American Crafts quarterly Walk-Through.

Since the company could not pay the agreed upon commission price ONE was not installed into the lobby of Unisys Corporation. Legal action was investigated with an attorney on grounds of a breach in contract. The only issue was no formal contract was drawn up and signed only a hand shake and their word. This was a lesson learned. No legal action was taken.

Installation

Installing a sculpture can be one of the most exciting feelings of the process. The moment when the sculpture is installed represents the completion of your vision. Ironically, the time leading up to a sculpture's installation is also one of the most stressful aspects of the entire process.

The hard part of finding a site is now over. The site has been surveyed and carefully considered. The relationship of the sculpture to its surroundings has been thought through and studied. The sculpture's placement and technical considerations have all been carefully calculated.

The day of installation represents the culmination of all the work, thought and time spent on that particular sculpture—the reality of seeing my vision through to the end. It also represents one of the most stressful times. At this point so many things can go wrong. The sculpture could be broken during transport or installation. You could have forgotten something which would impede the installation process. Safety becomes a greater concern at this stage.

Each of the three installed commissioned public sculptures, ADZ\PICK, PLW\SHN, and Chisel\Spike in this body of work had different installation considerations and procedures. My method of approach for installing a commissioned sculpture was pretty much the same in each case.

ADZ\PICK

The biggest sculpture, ADZ\PICK is a 20 foot high, 8 foot square at the base, fiberglass and stainless steel sculpture anchored to a 12 foot square charcoal colored concrete pad. (See illustration, appendix A, page 2) The fiberglass has an applied patina eluding to aged bronze.(See illustration, appendix A, back cover and page 4) Because of its height, the

sculpture was constructed in a horizontal position. ADZ\PICK was never seen in the vertical position until it was erected as a finished sculpture on January 10 2000—it looked just as envisioned.

A great deal of time was spent planning the placement of the sculpture and its relationship to the surrounding area. A 20 foot high wooden model was built at the office park site to determine the sculpture's placement and position in relation to the building and technical considerations. When the position was determined, the model was removed and the permanent concrete pad was poured.

It was pouring rain when the sculpture left the fabrication area in the city of Rochester for installation that afternoon in the Town of Brighton. Two photographers were hired to document the entire day- delivery, installation and the completed sculpture.

A crane was needed to lift the 20 foot high ADZ\PICK sculpture into place and into position on the poured concrete pad. (See illustrations, appendix A, page 14) With the assistance and support of the Hilti Corporation eight holes were drilled in the concrete to secure the sculpture with stainless steel anchoring bolts. The entire installation process took just over three and a half hours. Later that night the rain had turned to snow and there were up to 75 mph wind gust blowing over trees and knocking down overhead express way signs. ADZ\PICK remained standing and suffered no damage.

Element K was very supportive of the commission, giving me complete freedom throughout the process. With the cooperation of the company this project was a success. It is important to work closely and stay in constant communication with your contact within the company- so that they stay involved. This is easier said than done. The commissioning company changed CEO's three times during the steps leading to installation and it was sold and bought by a different organization during the commissions fabrication. Many challenges and much stress were faced during these transitions. The company sponsored the professional publication of a twenty page scholarly documentation which highlights the

commissioned sculpture ADZ\PICK and the complete body of work. "From River Bank to Tower, Brad Spencer, Clay/Steel/Fiberglass " was accepted into the United States Library of Congress fulfilling my thesis proposal to publicize my work.

PLW\SHN

On February 23, 1999 a catered reception was held to formally present the permanently installed sculptures, PLW\SHN. (See illustration, appendix A, page 12) As a follow up to the installation of these two wall sculptures an invitation was extended by the school superintendent to speak as a guest lecturer to Brighton High School. A lecturer was presented to students, community members and elected town leaders about the idea, creation and installation of my work. R News filmed my lecture and aired it several times on television. As well, additional coverage was shown by News Chanel10 and Fox News after they aired the reception and an interview with me. The broadcasted interview allowed me a great opportunity to talk about the ideas and reasons for my clay and stainless steel sculptures.

The sculptures hang on a wall in the high school media center. The two wall sculptures flank a large two story glass pane window. The media center is on two floors with a dramatic spiral staircase between the two levels. I was especially impressed with this location. Earlier other possible locations had been looked at with the school principal. An area with high visibility, a low chance of vandalism, and most importantly a location where the sculptures visually worked well with the existing environment was desirable.

With the help of two assistants and a forty foot ladder we worked four to five hours to position, mount and anchor the sculptures on the media center wall. One professional photographer was there to document the installation. These photos were later printed in published news articles about my sculptures by various Rochester newspapers.

Chisel\Spike

The clay and stainless steel sculpture Chisel\Spike was permanently installed in the lobby of Hammer Lithograph Corporations new modern printing facility headquarters in 1999. (See illustration, appendix A, page 15) The sculpture sat on a basalt grey colored pedestal.

After meeting several times with the CEO and President of the company during the construction of the building I had an excellent idea were the sculpture could be placed and what the environment would be around the piece.

The installation of Chisel\Spike took less than a half an hour to place in the office location. An informal reception was held for the company workers to view the sculpture and meet the artist.

Technical

Push the boundaries until they break.

This way of thinking was a valuable lesson learned in the technical decision making processes. Although painful in application, breaking the boundaries and pushing things over the limit, allowed me to know the true limits.

Personal knowledge is also the key to successful construction and fabrication. Without the many people who have shared their knowledge these sculptures would not have been successful. I am appreciative of those I have worked with especially Rick Hirsch, Len Urso and Wendell Castle with whom that exchange happened so easily and willingly.

There were many technical issues in the fabrication and construction of these sculptures. Listed below are some of the technical issues that were encountered and worked through.

Choice of Metal

My idea was to juxtapose a rough, weathered surface with a shiny, clean surface. A metal was needed that would over time remain clean and shiny. This led me to select stainless steel as the material of choice. Mild steel oxidizes to produce a rusted surface texture, and because of its high nickel content, stainless steel does not. Since my idea was to show something old against something new, it was very important to have a metal that did not show oxidization. Depending on the grade of stainless steel it is virtually immune to rust and corrosion.

Working With Stainless Steel

Stainless steel can only be cut and shaped by grinding, sawing or by plasma gas. An oxy/acetylene torch will not cut stainless steel. Plasma

cutting is a relatively simple process were air (plasma gas) is heated by electricity creating a plasma arc that is hot enough to melt any metal. Stainless steel is a hard material to work with but having the right tools at your use makes all the difference. Another issue of working with stainless steel is not to use tools such as grinding wheels, wire brushes die grinders etc., that have been used on ferrous metals. Why? Tiny particles of iron can be transferred over to the stainless steel and these ferrous particles will oxidize causing rust on the stainless steel surface.

Combining Clay and Steel

The one tricky part about combining clay and metal or anything that is piercing or fitted to or through clay is calculating shrinkage. Test were done on the clay body developed to determine its shrinkage at a hard cone ten firing. The clay shrinkage was usually ten to eleven percent of the clay body after the firing. When combining clay and steel or stainless steel, which was used,

Carving Blue Styrofoam

One aspect of the construction process was to design forms, referencing aged, handled tools, in blue styrofoam . Ironically, working with a new, modern material such as styrofoam led me to produce a plaster press mold which created a textured clay surface with the appearance of age and usage. This developed three step process produced what I was looking for in surface texture. Another aspect to the approach of using this process was it created the feeling of a cast look in the clay forms. The forms looked much as if they had been cast referencing the long history of casting actual functional tools.

Plaster Press Mold

The use of a plaster press mold helped create the aged surface texture I was looking for. It also allowed me to produce many forms at a faster rate than slab or hand construction would have.

A fiberglass and rebar reenforced plaster press mold weighing over 450 pounds was used in the construction process of the center form for ADZ\PICK. (See illustration, appendix A, page 13) Over 675 pounds of clay was then pushed into the 8 foot long and 4 foot wide mold to create one quarter of this form. Once the clay had set roughly two weeks the mold was flipped and lifted off of the clay. This aspect of the process is rather straight forward the only difference was working with this large size and weight.

Choice of Fiberglass over Clay

Initially I decided on using high fired clay for the Sculpture ADZ\PICK. The fired clay would then have an oxide patina applied to its surface to add the effect of age. The draw back was the process of high firing the piece and the enormous weight of a 16 foot long clay form. With a fired weight of over 1300 pounds working with the form would become more complicated and cumbersome. After extensive research and investigation into how a fiberglass surface can show patina effectively, fiberglass was chosen as the optimal choice. (See illustrations, appendix A, page 10 and 13)

Patina over Fiberglass

Many variations of patina were tested on small sheets of fiberglass until the desired effect was achieved. Oxidation was created on the fiberglass surface by applying flakes of bronze metal suspended in an acrylic sealing compound and using a chemical reaction created a green and burgundy oxidation. (See illustrations, appendix A, page 2, 4 and back cover)

Urethane Rubber Glove Mold

The fiberglass form was assembled from four castings. Polyurethane was brushed over the clay section created in the plaster press mold in order to make a mold for the fiberglass casting. The surface texture on the clay

was very uneven and had many undercuts and recesses. The urethane glove mold was flexible and could handle these characteristics.

The first castings from the urethane mold were not a success. Because of all the surface texture on the form the fiberglass was drying at an uneven rate creating slumps and sags. This was unacceptable to me. The solution was a vacuum bag mold to hold the fiberglass resin tight to the mold through the drying process. A vacuum bag mold is just a fancy word for a process which removes air from an enclosed space by means of a motor to create a downward suction. The first casting with the vacuum mold solved the slumping and looked identical to the clay form. (See illustration, appendix A, page 10)

Site Drainage

Part of figuring out the placement of the sculpture is the issue of site drainage. Drainage routs, sewage lines, gas and electrical lines must be checked before finally determining the placement of the sculpture. If possible, meeting with the original architects and engineers about the building/site can be very helpful.

Concrete

ADZ\PICK was designed to sit on a 12' x 12' square charcoal colored textured concrete pad. Many test were done mixing colorant in with small amounts of concrete to find the desired look. At the time of pouring the colorant was added to the concrete right on site. This was done by adding bags of different colorants directly into the mixing truck while the concrete and aggregate were mixing.

The weight of the sculpture was pre-determined and the proper amount of rebar and metal mesh was tied in to strengthen the poured concrete pad. The concrete was allowed to dry and many months allowed to pass to check for any settling.

Scale Calculation

The representation of the sculpture from model to a larger scale was a concern. I questioned if multiplying the model 10 times bigger, would the full size have the same appearance and effect of the model. (See illustration, appendix A, page 16) The answer was no.

Knowing that ancient Greek architects down to the Romans had learned they must taper a stone column in order for it to appear to be the same thickness from top to bottom, much thought was applied to scale calculation. So of course, in figuring my calculations for the increase in size of ADZ\PICK this was taken into much consideration.

With a suggestion from world renowned artist Wendell Castle a transparency was made from a drawing of ADZ\PICK, then projected onto a wall to determine scale calculations. As simple as pulling up a chair it was possible to study the scale and proportion of the sculpture at twenty feet tall. Changes now could be made and measurements could be taken to solve this technical issue.

Placement of Sculptures

How do you determine what a sculpture will look like in a proposed setting? A solution was to create a computer rendering for the sculptures being permanently installed into public spaces. This was the case with the sculpture PLW\SHN for Brighton High School Media Center. Another solution in addition to a computer rendering was to construct a full scale wooden model at the site for the sculpture ADZ\PICK. With the full size wooden model other factors besides placement could be determined. Most of the questions of placement could be resolved on the computer.

The advantage of the full size wooden model allowed for a real viewing of the sculpture out side in the office park. Here the wind factor could be determined. You wouldn't want the work blowing over because wind gust were hitting the broad side of the piece.

Conclusion

After realizing much time was spent my first year of graduate school sketching and making small maquettes, a frustration grew not knowing what or if I would ever come to see any of these models as full size sculptures. The decision to find and accept sites was out of necessity. There was a need to see my sculptures at the scale envisioned, complementing their setting and completing my vision.

Through this process, I learned how to start with an idea, develop it on paper and with the help of others, see it through to completion. The installation of a large scale commissioned sculpture, two other public sculptures and several other sculptures all involved insight and planning. This included gathering resources needed to complete, install and publicize the finished works. (See illustration, appendix A)

The entire process was a growing experience. Many technical and conceptual issues were resolved. Learning how to think before making, developing and understanding the idea and the reasons for shaping the material, was far more important than the physical process. Shaping and fabricating for a desired result, working from an outline and not searching for a meaning later, taught me how to represent my ideas.

The process is as much about passion as it is frustration, but when the sculpture is completed and installed I find myself eagerly thinking about the next one.

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ADZ\PICK
Fiberglass and Stainless Steel
20'x8'x8'



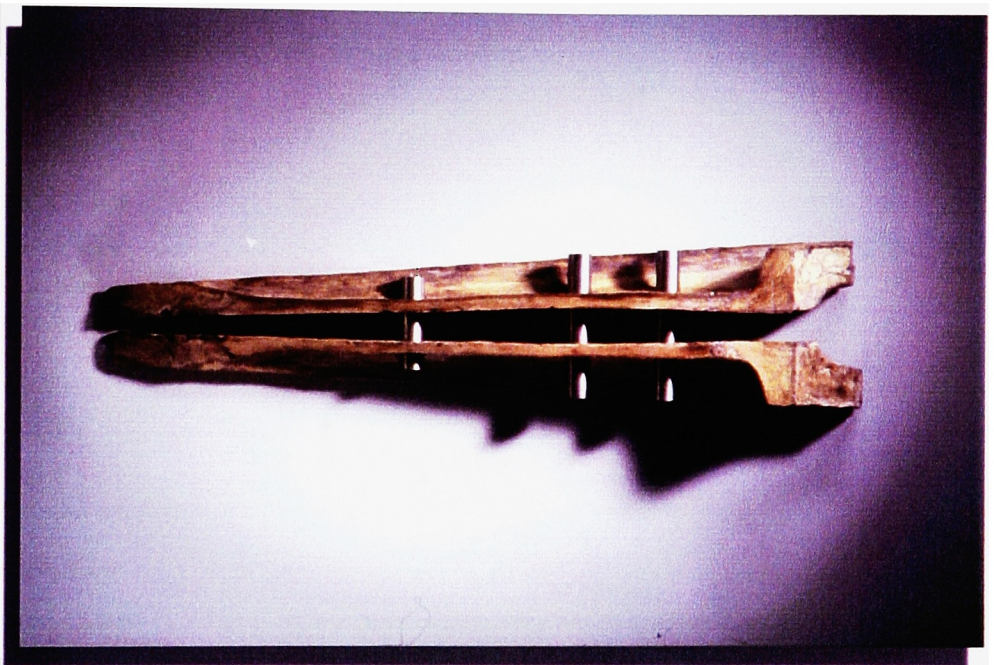
ONE
Clay and Stainless Steel
25"x11"x5"



Chisel\Spike
Clay and Stainless Steel
48"x9"x9"



Chisel\Spike II
Clay and Stainless Steel
45"x8"x8"



PLW\SHN
Clay and Stainless Steel
32"x7"x7"