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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Thoughts on Fragility and Impermanence

by

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November 22, 2003

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Thoughts on Fragility and Impermanence

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Abstract

This thesis project consists of two sections. The first of these sections is the creation of four physically separate, conceptually linked sculptures installed in the Dyer Arts Center Gallery in the Lyndon B. Johnson building on the Rochester Institute of Technology campus. The latter part of the project exists in the form of this written thesis, which will explore various concepts, processes and concerns associated with the individual sculptures and the prevailing ideas inherent to them all.

Within both the sculptural work and the written work I am exploring the fragility and vulnerability of being human. The reality of impermanence within our lives and surroundings is often overlooked and disregarded within our culture. Our societal focus on consumption, comfort and control discounts any value in recognizing the fragility of our individual and interconnected lives. Without such reverence and attention we become splintered, detached and isolated from the reality of natural laws, from connectedness with one another, and from a basic sense of 'meaning' within our lives. I am interested in the underlying strength available through the recognition and valuation of our human fragilities and limitations. Focusing on fragility has led to a new understanding of inner strength and to expanded reflection on the power of humility over ego.

for my father,
whose struggles taught me compassion,
and whose death taught me to truly live.

Acknowledgments

Every new project, situation and experience brings with it new relationships while strengthening some previously established bonds and connections. I would like to acknowledge everyone who stood by me during this process, offering support and encouragement throughout the entirety of these two years.

Firstly I would like to thank my family and friends. This thesis project would not have been possible without the loving devotion of Margaret whose commitment to and belief in my work has been a ceaseless source of strength. I am indebted to, and deeply grateful for, her continuous encouragement, enthusiasm and willingness to join me in this process. Thanks also to my mother from whom there flows an endless supply of trust in the goodness available to those who “risk” and the unwavering encouragement to continue changing, growing, and expanding within this life.

I wish to extend special thanks to my thesis committee members, each of whom challenged me to stretch, dig deeper, and trust in the truth within. I am professionally and personally indebted to Eileen Bushnell and Julia Galloway for demanding high levels of intellectual and conceptual rigor, and for showing immense support and compassion to me throughout this thesis project.

And lastly, may I offer sincere and heartfelt gratitude to Rick Hirsch. Throughout these two years I have grown to know you as a teacher of great strength, sensitivity and honesty. It was an honor to work with you and a privilege to learn so much from your wisdom, insight and experience.

Introduction

Ideas are ways of seeing and knowing, or knowing by means of insighting. Ideas allow us to envision, and by means of vision we can know.

-James Hillman-

In my opinion all important things in art have always originated from the deepest feeling about the mystery of Being.

-Max Beckman-

I am not a practicing Buddhist, nor do I practice any other form of organized religion. There are, however, many aspects of Buddhist philosophy with which I feel deeply connected. At various times in life I have come across concepts and ideas set forth by Buddhist thinkers and practitioners that, quite simply, make good sense. With my predisposition towards self-analysis and a deep interest in psychology, perhaps it follows that a philosophy based upon reflection and meditation would naturally speak to me. The starting point within this thesis project was not based on any Buddhist precepts or foundations but rather on the self – namely myself - and the various ways in which I present myself to and interact with other people. Through the practice of art making, reflection and critical discourse I have found my way back to the beginning, revisiting many thoughts, beliefs and concepts from the past. As evidenced within these pages my interest in Buddhist philosophy has proved most relevant in the making of, and writing about this work.

Liz Howe, June 2003

Personality/Universality

To study Buddhism is to study the self.
To study the self is to forget the self.
To forget the self is to be one with others.
-Dogen-

At the start of this work I chose the average American diner mug as a metaphoric self-portrait and began searching for a place of psychological interiority. In the early stages of work this search consisted of using the diner mug to explore various postures and aspects of personality. I was interested in my own characteristics and general personality type as well as those of people unlike myself. Personality became the foremost aspect of each of the ensuing cup sculptures and rather quickly evidenced the visual and conceptual limitations drawn by using the diner mug as primary form and symbol. Each sculptural solution – the sturdy cup filled with fragile sheets, the diner mug as container of the “void”, the mug thrown askew by brightly colored tendons – all succeeded in *closing off* passage into the deep, psychological space, beneath personality, to which I sought entrance. These “personality cups” were concerned more with surfaces, façades and appearances that seemed to defend rather than reveal a sense of interiority.

It was clear that an interior reality and the visual language with which to speak of such things would not be accessible without opening to the psyche (defined as the soul, spirit, mind)¹ and moving away from personality (an individual’s characteristics and how they are presented to other people)². I began to *re-cognize* that underneath various aspects of personality and displays of self, there exists a shared universality. Within that realm subsist deep linkages between us all, linkages that I was, and am, more interested in than various personal differences. To engage in a subject worthy of long-term investigation I ceased focusing on myself, or any particular personality type and proceeded to seek out principles more universally relevant to all of humanity.

As this conceptual concern with the differences between people fell away so did my reliance on the diner mug as the primary form of investigation. The specificity of the diner mug as a symbol created an emotional distance between the viewer and the work due to the overt

familiarity and subsequent associations of the form. This erased opportunities, other than anecdotal exchanges, between object and viewer. Paring down this recognizable object into an abstraction of itself allowed for a clearer, simpler approach to the work. The narrative qualities and strong associations were stripped away, permitting more direct approachability and open interpretations. British sculptor Anish Kapoor talks in an interview about:

The process of emptying the form out, of non-form. It's never non-image, but non-form. And the curious thing about emptying out is that it isn't empty, that somehow it has a psychological recall, even metaphysical recall, that immediately seems to bring content. I think that's fascinating, the idea that as the work becomes purer in its emptiness, all sorts of other things come into play.³

As I began emptying the original diner mug form, the work developed through an unveiling of layers. More and more visual information was taken away as I moved beyond my own limiting constructs and categorizations. Through the resulting revelations – visual, conceptual and personal – I found myself fixed upon the concept of *Fragility* – as it connected to my own experiences of temporality, impermanence. There seemed a certain freedom associated with contemplation of these universal principles. Simultaneously digging into the layers of my own personal concerns and the sculptural form brought me to the use of a thin core or cylinder, an abstraction of the original diner mug, as a more apt metaphoric symbol for the universality of the fragile self. Through draining the cup of recognizable cues and using the actuality of extreme thinness and openness, a more physical experience of fragility was created. With this move into abstraction came the realization of a great paradox: recognition of the fragility of life brings a sense of strength and of freedom. My investment became more serious upon adopting *Fragility* as my core concept as I then felt the work to be infused with a larger sense of meaning.

The decisive question for man is: Is he related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of his life. Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance...if we understand and feel that here in this life we already have a link with the infinite, desires and attitudes change. In the final analysis we count for something only because of the essential we embody, and if we do not embody that, life is wasted.⁴

Experiences of Fragility

The space became very powerful and strong, almost luminous. There were no thoughts occurring. For days it was like that, as if reality had shifted. My whole life I had heard about death, had seen people who were dying and people who had died. But my father's death struck me in a very different way. His mortality made me realize my own mortality. It made me realize everybody's mortality. It shook me out of my misconceptions. It profoundly changed my attitude. For many months I thought about how I was going to live the rest of my life. I realized that death was real. I mustn't waste time...having this intimate experience of death helped me appreciate my life.⁵

These words of Sakyong Mipham describe so well the experience of losing a parent. Having firsthand knowledge of this same loss I am familiar with his description of expanded awareness regarding personal and universal mortality.

Upon my grandmother's death in 1996 my experience of the fleeting nature and fragility of life was dramatically deepened. Never before had I witnessed the gradual decay into death of the physical body and spirit of a person whom I loved. Watching her slowly let go of people, places and personal concerns was a life-changing occurrence connecting me to the mysterious reality of life and death.

When my father died two years later I witnessed a sharp contrast to the slow process of death previously experienced in caring for my grandmother. With his sudden death, so unexpected, came an ever more profound realization of life's fragility. My father's departure was a powerful indication of the temporality and unpredictability of life. Death stepped one generation closer to me at that time, as the call to wake up and attend to the quality of each moment, decision and action within this life grew increasingly louder.

It is beneficial to be aware that you will die. Why? If you are not aware of death, you will not be mindful...but will just spend your life meaninglessly, not examining what sorts of attitudes and actions perpetuate suffering and which ones bring about happiness.

If you are not mindful that you might die soon, you will fall under the sway of a false sense of permanence.⁶

The Dahli Lama speaks also of the spiritual motivation that comes through acknowledgment of and meditation upon our own death,

It is better to decide from the very beginning that you will die and investigate what is worthwhile. If you keep in mind how quickly this life disappears, you will value your time and do what is valuable. With a strong sense of the imminence of death, you will feel the need to engage in spiritual practice, improving your mind, and will not waste your time in various distractions...⁷

Perhaps a romanticized view of the artist as “spiritual seeker” has grown out of fashion within our post-modernized culture of skepticism and doubt. It is a belief in the value of truth and the search for a profound understanding of life, however, that binds me to the processes of creativity and art making. Processes such as these, embarked upon with intention and commitment, have led artists of many disciplines to this same realization: that art serves as the visual account of meditation and an inner transformation relevant for all human beings. Painter Squeak Carnwath speaks of this process through her artistic discipline,

The practice of painting...I’m very involved in it, and so its natural outcome is this spiritual concern. If you consider it long enough and deeply enough a conversion experience will occur. On the other side of that conversion experience, or transformation, is this understanding of our fragility of being-that we’re just specks. And really we’re just witnesses. It’s our job to come to some understanding of that. I want the work to evidence that endeavor.⁸

The work in this project has grown into an investigation of qualities of ‘being’ that are essential to my philosophies and beliefs while simultaneously enhancing the personal significance of my prior life experiences. I have been reminded through the making of this work that life is brief and presents a fine opportunity, perhaps the only opportunity, to grow in understanding, experience and wisdom.

The Thin Fragile Core

A thin, fragile core is the sculptural form and foundation of each piece in the final work and exhibition, referencing the core interior of a being. This abstracted symbol speaks *for* me of emptiness, vulnerability, openness and fragility. When these forms fall, they break, as do we. The material, however, will withstand the test of time, with quietude, meditated upon and still. The nearly broken, slightly cracked ceramic material serves to emphasize the fragile and impermanent nature of humanity, “The word *humility* comes from *humus*, which means earth or mud. To be humble is to feel ourselves as part of the earth – made from dust, returning to dust.”⁹ Clay is perhaps the only material so charged with such comparisons to human nature, creation and existence. My aim was to continue that symbolic linkage between the quality of earth (or clay) and the whole of humanity.

In his teachings on suffering, the Buddha made clear that some kind of humiliation awaits us all. This is the truth that he felt could be apprehended by those with ‘little dust in their eyes.’ No matter what we do, he taught, we cannot sustain the illusion of our self-sufficiency. We are all subject to decay, old age and death, to disappointment, loss and disease. We are all engaged in a futile struggle to maintain ourselves in our own image. The crises in our lives inevitably reveal how impossible our attempts to control our destinies really are. At some point, we all find ourselves...caught between decay and death.

The Four Noble Truths take this vulnerability as a starting point, cultivating humility out of the seemingly oppressive and inescapable humiliations of life.¹⁰

These humble core cylinders, created from paper towel soaked in clay slip and cast, were the starting point within the project. Each sculpture had a basis in or connection to the core form. Through the creation and installation of this work a subtle linear narrative developed between the pieces. I saw this progression as the revealing and opening of the core cylinder form.

Waking Up In Isolation

We do not want to admit our lack of substance to ourselves and instead try to project an image of completeness or self-sufficiency. The paradox is that to the extent that we succumb to this urge, we are estranged from ourselves and are *not real*.¹¹

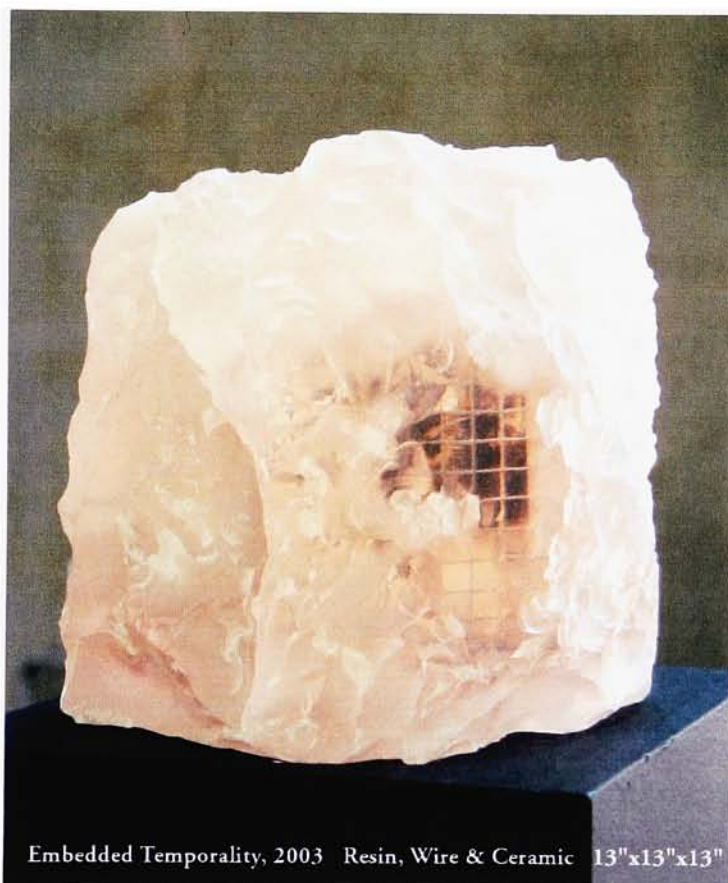
The sculpture, *Embedded Temporality*, speaks of isolation, disconnectedness and a lack of consciousness. The toughest, strongest among us remains, at the very core, a temporal being. There is no escaping the reality of our mortality, though as individuals and as a culture we seem to deny or fight against this. It seems the more one fights this unquestionable reality the more removed and isolated a person becomes. Links between us slip away as we struggle against our true nature. As Tibetan Buddhist Master Sogyal Rinpoche notes, “Confined in the dark narrow cage of our own making which we take for the whole universe, very few of us can even begin to imagine another dimension of reality.”¹² Impermanence, fragility and interdependence are difficult realities to accept while focusing on the concerns of our day-to-day lives.

Embedded Temporality (13”x13”) stands in aloneness atop a black pedestal, as metaphor for the cultural illusion of self-sufficiency and independence. A tiny black clay cylinder is locked within a wire cage, embedded completely within a crystal quartz-like block of carved acrylic resin. The fragile core cylinder is trapped in the translucent, impenetrable layers of steel and stone. Carved, chipped and sandblasted, this block of resin glows with pink atmospheric light, offering two views of the internal dark center. The polished windows on either side of the sculpture entice the viewer into the piece while mysterious inner swirls and cracks deny clear visual access to the interior construction.

Through the pouring of this cast resin piece an unexpected, advantageous cracking occurred through varying thermal expansion rates between the resin and steel wire. The resulting fault lines permit further visual access into the core, caged piece. These cracks create an action/reaction effect within the sculpture as a stifling restrictive layer shifts and cracks under internal forces of growth.

The ego strives for a personal power and lasting solidity that when indulged traps us in separateness as we deny the reality of our own fragility, mortality and interconnectedness. Through the recognition of our impermanence we gain awareness of the connectedness between people and the freedom to cease fighting or hiding; competition falls away.

The greatest obstacle is the ego. Ego- or rather one's *view* of one's "I" – is at the root of all problems and suffering according to Buddhist thought. When Buddhists talk about ego they refer to the illusory belief in a solid, concrete separate entity, independent and disconnected from any other phenomena. In that sense naturally the ego becomes an insurmountable barrier between oneself and the rest of the world, with no possibility of true communication and communion, not only with others but also with the depths of oneself.¹³



Embedded Temporality, 2003 Resin, Wire & Ceramic 13"x13"x13"

An Acceptance of Reality

The sculpture, *Human Frailty*, consists of six 18" high stone plinths grouped in front of and beneath a massive, hovering cement stairwell. Each plinth holds a thin, sandblasted clay core save for one upon which rests the shards and dust left from a crushed and ground cylinder. The cement wall and 3" thick cement tumble stones create a solid contrast with the fragile 'cores' and speak of the contrast between mortality and a sense of timelessness or history.

Throughout the evolution of *Human Frailty* I explored ideas and solutions that would resolve a few key concerns. These concerns consisted of maintaining connectedness between the forms, using materials and environment as metaphor for fragility juxtaposed and unified with stability, and the formation of an inherent quietude or restfulness within the piece. Using a *Minimalist* simplicity of placement within a linear format created the calm sense of order so essential to the stillness of this sculpture. The repeating, equally sized stacks of stone and centered placement of clay cylinders upon all but one emphasized the universal nature of life and death. Employing narrative through incorporating one pile of shards and dust of the same clay material (and from an actual full-sized cylinder) upon the foremost plinth served to enhance my initial metaphorical concept.

I called upon the experience of my father's death in creating this sculpture and yet this piece is not about his death. The strong underpinning beneath each cylinder acted as metaphoric symbol for the firm foundation essential to exploring issues of life and death and the acceptance of our own temporal existence. Each cylinder was sandblasted to emphasize the thin, fragile nature of the forms while alluding to the natural processes of disintegration caused by wind or water. Death is as natural a process as is life, natural as the breath of the wind or the running of water. Recognition of this sets the ego in its right place, reducing fear and enabling us to more freely focus upon the essential concerns of life.



Freedom and Fragility

In the largest piece entitled *Fragility* (8'x 10') the cylinder form was literally and figuratively opened up, creating a field of eighteen sandblasted porcelain sheets floating above a soft, thick black base. This sculpture was initially conceived through ideas of viewer participation – forcing the viewer to step onto an area of broken ceramic material - creating an experience of fragility through direct physical interaction. In experiments along these lines it became clear that a shift in perception occurred when an unbroken fragile slab was placed on, or hovered slightly above, the floor. The act of stepping upon a section of floor filled with ceramic shards seemed a lesser experience than the intensity of physical awareness associated with the fear of breaking something.

The concept of a common ground of human existence, referenced through the use of multiple floating porcelain sheets, added to the overall visual drama of the piece. A slight shadow, cast below each of the eighteen 11"x 22" sheets (elevated on three-inch-high black wooden stilts) further enhanced this dramatic effect and added a subtle illusion of movement. Each piece above the black felt covered wooden platform was created by dipping and soaking paper towel in a Cone 6 porcelain slip. The resulting slabs were fan dried to insure a slight curling effect on the edges and 'over-fired' to Cone 8. This densely vitreous, fired clay proved strong enough to handle, sandblast and transport with a relatively low rate of loss.

The conceptual foundation of weightlessness and freedom, found through contemplation of natural laws of life and death, attained form within this sculpture. These metaphysical, spiritual concerns and intentions are quite difficult to verbalize, at least for me. Perhaps it is the poet (more skilled with language) who breathes life into words that can tell of these things. Anish Kapoor states, "I think that the whole idea that in a world where most things are explainable art remains unexplained and unexplainable is absolutely crucial."¹⁴ The artist, Eva Hesse wrote in a sketchbook, "I would like the work to be non-work...this means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions."¹⁵ Within *Fragility* I found a soft humility and the quiet mystery paramount to expressing the ideas with which I began.



Fragility, 2003 Porcelain, Wood & Felt 8'x10'



Fragility (detail)

The Sound of Impermanence

The final, and lastly conceived, piece in the exhibition entitled *The Sound of Impermanence* represents a departure from the other pieces while employing many of the same production methods and techniques. The wall-hung sculpture measuring 7½' long, 5' high and 2" deep consists of over 500 thin sheets of painted black porcelain and paper clay. Each narrow unit in the sculpture, created through the dipped paper process described earlier, was placed in an EKG line pattern stretching 7½' in length.

Installing this large EKG was a process quite different from installation of the accompanying pieces in the exhibition. Three two and one-half foot pre-drawn templates, lain on the gallery floor, acted as guiding maps during the three-day installation process. The participation of approximately nine gracious assistants made execution of this piece possible. The tightly spaced black fragile pieces were carefully strung from support beams with thin fishing line and measured, in length, according to the pre-drawn templates. Upon completion of each of the three sections the team of assistants raised the sections into place, attaching the support beams to the hanging track eleven feet above the gallery floor. Few pieces were broken considering the intensely fragile nature of the procedure and the individual strings remained mostly untangled, needing only minor adjustment post-hanging. The fragility of each piece and potential for tangling wires in transport were the commanding reasons for construction within the gallery.

The on-site installation called for a community effort, essential to realizing the finished piece, which expanded the conceptual concerns touched upon in earlier sculptures. In my experience an acceptance and understanding of our fragility and impermanence brings one a deep sense of personal freedom. Freedom from constraints of self and the daunting demands of the ego. When we accept our fragility we can recognize the concept of what in Tibetan Buddhism is called "emptiness", otherwise understood as interconnectedness. As Soygal Rinpoche elaborates:

If everything is impermanent, then everything is what we call 'empty', which means lacking in any lasting, stable and inherent

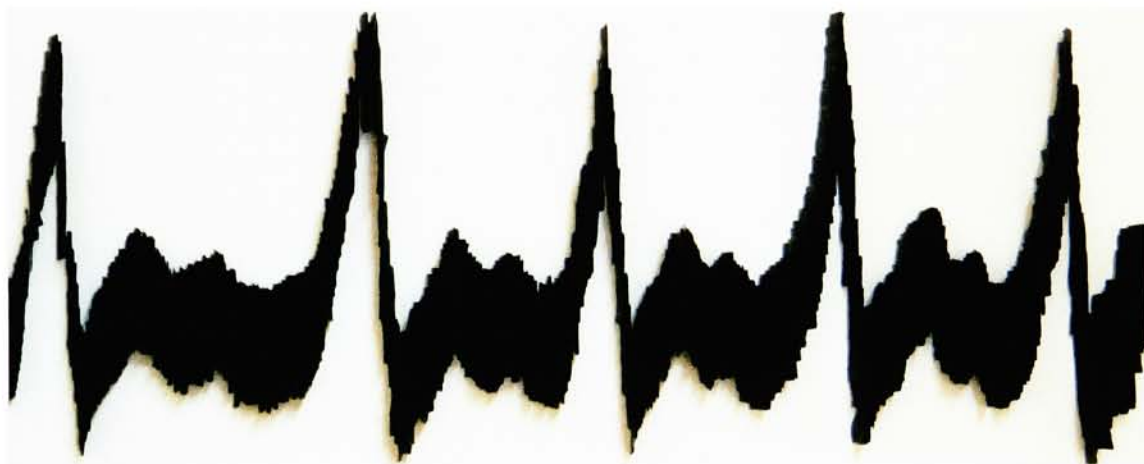
existence; and all things, when seen and understood in their true relation, are not independent but interdependent with all other things.¹⁶

The heartbeat represented in this sculpture, and the interconnectedness of each sheet of clay, act as symbols for the life within each of us - the life beneath ego and any preconceived notions we carry about who we are, have been or will become. We may find solidarity, regardless of our differences, upon recognition and assimilation of our fragile nature and resultant interconnectedness. Interdependency builds strength not attainable through an isolated, ego-driven approach to living – one sheet of painted black porcelain would not convey the symbolic EKG image as did the grouping of several hundred.

The Sound of Impermanence offered me the opportunity to call upon another group, a community of people, expanding the metaphor of interconnectedness from a place of embedded-ness within the sculpture to the experience of installation as well.

My personal experience as ‘artist and creator’ shifted upon installation, as I became just one of the people working toward the final realization of the sculpture. This experience, working alongside my fellows, highlighted my understanding of the personal limitations I would have run up against had the work been approached in isolation, void of outside influence or participation. This increased my understanding of the strength available through acknowledgement and appreciation of the interdependence of all people and all things.

At this point, that which I had striven for in the work filtered into my personal experience, and perhaps the experience of those working alongside me. What I ask of Art (my own artwork and the work of others) began appearing in this work: that I grow from the making of Art, that I change as the work changes, that the processes of creativity affect and transform my ways of thinking, believing and living and that I become ever more connected to the deep-seated universality of humanity. As Anish Kapoor states (there is) “the idea that somehow, some fundamental transformation takes place in the process of doing this thing that we call making art which leads to something else. Something non-personal.”¹⁷



The Sound of Impermanence, 2003 Painted Porcelain, Monofilament & Wood, 5"x7 1/2"



The Sound of Impermanence (detail)

Art and Influences

If I copy the surface of a head exactly in a sculpture, what's inside? Nothing but a great mass of dead clay! In the living head, the inside is just as organic as the surface, right? So, a head that seems real...is like a bridge, a bridge with a surface that resembles a head; but you have the feeling that the inside is empty if it's made out of clay. If it's made out of stone, you feel that it's a mass of stone. And already there's something false whether it's empty or a mass of stone, because there's no resemblance at all, because in your skull there's not a millimeter that's not organic.

-Alberto Giacometti-

Alberto Giacometti speaks of the interior of a being, what we cannot see beneath the surface, and his attempt to bring truth to the representation of this interiority within his sculpture. He elaborates upon his own work: "So, in a certain sense, in the narrow heads there's just enough clay for them to stand up and nothing more. The inside is something absolutely necessary. Necessarily there's more resemblance with a living head than one that's just a copy of the exterior."¹⁸ Thus is the nature of Abstraction.

This attempt to pull forth the living essence of a form, human or otherwise, by delving more deeply into it is a process shared by many artists who have greatly influenced my work. Artists such as Mark Rothko, whose painting explored the universality of emotion through color; Eva Hesse, whose sensitivity to the visceral physicality inherent to sculpture texturized the male-dominated "finish fetish" world of High Minimalism; and Anish Kapoor, a contemporary sculptor who builds his abstracted geometric forms from myth, metaphor and meaning while employing unsentimental processes of industrial fabrication to do so.

These artists share the use of non-representational form, as related to our understanding of the physical world and things around us, at the same time provoking our deepest 'sense' experiences. Through use of color, texture, scale and the manipulation of their various materials we are offered an aesthetic, sense experience within the paradigm of abstract geometry.

As Wilhelm Worringer stated in *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908); “To call for aid upon the laws of the inorganic in order to raise the organic into a timeless sphere, to eternalize it, is a law of all art, but exceptionally so of sculpture.”¹⁹ Donald Kuspit, expanding on Worringer’s ideas suggests:

“...the most deeply engaging sculpture being made today integrates the organic and the geometrical with no sacrifice of either. That is, the same piece of sculpture can be read exclusively in organic or geometrical terms, even as it is instantly clear that it is a seamless unity of the organic and the geometrical, so that their separation by formal analysis is callous, simplifying and falsifying.”²⁰

This reading of contemporary sculpture seems an apt description of the ‘art world’ place in which my works stands. Influenced by abstractionists and focused on organic surface, coupled with geometric patterning in the placement of forms, my work echoes the installation processes associated with Minimalist work, particularly the work of Eva Hesse.

Other contemporary visual artists such as Maya Lin, builder of massive sculptures that exude a powerful quietude; Vaja Celmins, who painstakingly executes black and white lithographs of undulating water, dirt and pebbled sections of desert floor, and intricately detailed spider webs; and the experimental, cross-discipline work of Steve Tobin, whose bodies of work vary in size, style and medium, all work in ways that I am drawn to. They each employ a sense of grand-ness, silence and exactitude whether working with mysterious, abstract forms in creating a sense of sacred familiarity or infusing familiar imagery with the mystery and depth associated with the sacred. All of them ask for our participation in the mystery of Being and for acknowledgment of the secret, unspeakable beauty existent within our fragile world and lives.

A sense of stillness and simplicity of form connects my work also with artists such as ceramicist Ruth Duckworth, sculptor Barbara Hepworth and the traditional ‘Japanese aesthetic’ associated with the rituals and practices of Zen Buddhism. I have sought an honest simplicity in the work, echoing thoughts that Maya Lin has about her own work: “I want to understand simplicity not as a rigid minimalist ideal, in which a formula toward

spareness is almost religiously pursued, but to see it as a composition of forms, material, and textures that is fundamentally 'quiet'.”²¹

Focusing on transmittal of a quiet presence and strong simplicity of form has been the unifying formal link within my work. These crucial aspects developed as the direct result of underlying conceptual concerns and not through overriding attachment to technique, forced manipulation of form, or pre-existing affections for specific “schools” of art. The intention to find the truest expression of personal concerns in an honestly personal voice was my guiding principle. The linkages I found to work of other artists were signposts along the way, offering direction and the essential camaraderie of shared aims.

The concerns of ‘spirit’ and of a shared universality have been vital elements within my work and working process. I aspire to create an art of deep-seated meaning, the truth of which echoes fervently within the minds and hearts of others. I believe, however naïve it may seem, that art has the power (or at very least the seed of power) to restore harmony in a world of discontentedness and strife. Wassily Kandinsky writes in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* of the spiritual values and ultimate responsibility of the artist:

The work of art is born of the artist in a mysterious and secret way. From him it gains life and being. Nor is its existence casual and inconsequent, but it has a definite and purposeful strength, alike in its material and spiritual life. It exists and has power to create spiritual atmosphere; and from this inner standpoint one judges whether it is a good work of art or a bad one. If its “form” is bad it means that the form is too feeble in meaning to call forth corresponding vibrations of the soul.

“Good drawing” is drawing that cannot be altered without destruction of this inner value, quite irrespective of its correctness and anatomy, botany, or any other science. There is no question of a violation of natural form, but only of the need of the artist for such form.

In fact, the artist is not only justified in using, but it is also his duty to use only those forms which fulfil his *own need*. Absolute freedom, whether from anatomy or anything of the kind, must be given the artist in his choice of material. Such spiritual freedom is as necessary in art as it is in life.²²

Kandisky expounds upon ideas of art making that I strongly prescribe to in his following statements:

It is very important for the artist to gauge his position aright, to realize that he has a duty to his art and to himself, that he is not king of the castle but rather a servant of a nobler purpose. He must search deeply into his own soul, develop and tend it, so that his art has something to clothe, and does not remain a glove without a hand.

The artist must have something to say, for mastery over form is not his goal but rather the adapting of form to its inner meaning.²³

It is my objective to continue striving towards this worthy goal, through the practice of art making, as I move out into the future and leave this work to stand as testament of an important juncture in this journey.

End Notes

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- ¹ Webster's New Dictionary and Thesaurus (Scotland: Geddes & Grosset Ltd., 1990), 438.
- ² Webster's, 401.
- ³ Martin Gayford with Anish Kapoor, "Looking In", *Modern Painters*, 13 no 1 Spring 2000, 98-100.
- ⁴ C.G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1989), 325.
- ⁵ Sakyong Mipham, Turning the Mind into an Ally (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), 156-7.
- ⁶ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Advice on Dying: and Living a Better Life, translated & edited by Jeffery Hopkins, Ph.D. (New York: Atria Books, 2002), 46.
- ⁷ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Advice on Dying, 51-2.
- ⁸ Richard Whittaker, "A Conversation with Squeak Carnwath", *Works and Conversations: A Journal of the Society for the Recognition of Art*, issue 1 March 1998
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²⁰ Donald Kuspit, "Abstraction", 52-7.

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