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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

AGRARIAN WAY

DANIEL JOSH • MAY 2005



A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE COLLEGE OF IMAGING ARTS AND SCIENCES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS



MY THESIS IS REALLY IN THREE FOLD. SINCE MY WORK HAS ITS ORIGIN IN THE RECOLLECTIONS OF MY EARLIEST **childhood memories**, I WILL EXPLAIN HOW THE PIECES IN MY SHOW ARE A RESULT OF THOSE EARLY MEMORIES. NEXT I WILL EXPLORE HOW THE PIECES I DESIGN ARE INFLUENCED BY MY CHILDHOOD OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH **farm life and agrarian equipment**. FINALLY, I WILL CONSIDER THE DIRECTION OF MY **future work**, AND HOW IT CAN CONTINUE TO GROW AND MATURE.

- FINAL APPROVALS -

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– EARLY CHILDHOOD OBSERVATIONS –

At the age of three I was diagnosed with a hearing loss. This disability not only affected my hearing, but it caused my speech to be delayed for years as well. Life was a quiet one for me as my experiences were primarily absorbed through my eyes. My hearing loss caused me to shut out many of life's noises and distractions and allowed me to key in on an activity for extensive periods of time. If I was digging in the dirt or tinkering with a toy, I was able to really concentrate on what I was doing. I could look at things more intensely because of the silence around me. Every detail of any particular object was always broken down in my mind into smaller details because I had the time and patience to do so. I was able to appreciate the fine details and designs of objects. As a young child, my communication skills were very limited. Although I had older siblings around me, I would often be playing alone because I could not communicate very well. Because of my limitations in communication and my ability to work on small scale, my favorite toys as a child were Legos. Legos gave me an opportunity to pay particular attention to detail as well as spend hours at a time building my own masterpieces. I was free to use my imagination in coming up with numerous different designs for buildings, cities or even vehicles.

Being raised in the country on rather large acreage I found there was always something interesting to look at and stimulate my imagination. My father was a farmer during the first part of my life. He had the typical farm setting consisting of livestock, a field for them to graze on, and numerous different pieces of machinery and equipment. With my interest in fine detail and design, I enjoyed looking at and playing with the different pieces of equipment and machinery on the farm. I can easily recall many of these items along with their intrinsic design and detail. For example, I can think of an old plow we had, which was smooth on one side and faded into a rougher surface at the nose, where it had taken on debris from the field and where corrosion had taken place. My fondest memory of this piece was of riding in the cab of the tractor, looking out of the back window, and seeing this plow for it's original intentions, disking. Putting the two concepts together, intent and form, created an object with function and beauty.

– MY PRESENT WORK AND ITS CONNECTIONS TO MY PAST –

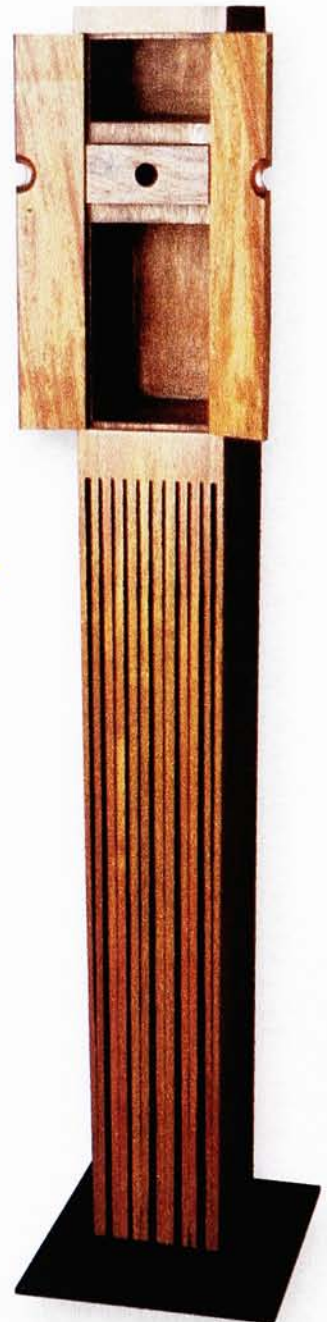
My thesis is about embracing a memory that I have of an object and creating a piece that connects with that particular memory. The connection I have with each piece varies as to what the sentimental value is to me. When considering ideas for my thesis work, I looked back at all the pieces that I created and tried to understand the origin of their designs. I decided to look at my more successful pieces to find out what invoked the ideas for each piece. For example, the A-Grater Stool stood out foremost because its genesis is still fresh in my mind. The origin of the A-Grater Stool came from the childhood memory of a Schwinn bicycle called the Sting-Ray. The Sting-Ray seat was the shape and color of a banana. I remember this seat as being very uncomfortable to sit on for any lengthy period of time. In an attempt to glorify the Sting-Ray and to also express the feeling of the uncomfortable seat, I decided to shape the stool top like the "banana" seat form. I also added a "pineapple" texture to its top to create a bumpy and unsettling seat, which helped to mimic the uncomfortable rides I used to take on the bike. This feeling of nostalgia that was created with the A-Grater Stool is the same feeling that I wanted to convey with my new work.

A-Grater Stool



The design of the Feather-Board Cabinet came to me in the middle of the night. I was reminiscing with my father about an experience I had when I was a young boy. The two of us were in a large, old, vacant lumber building. I can recollect walking around the dark, moist building and being able to smell the dirt on the ground. I ended up stumbling across an old artifact in the building and being so interested in it that I brought it home. The artifact that I found was the feather-board from which I based the first piece of my thesis work. When I started sketching the Feather-Board Cabinet, I wanted the interior to have the same feeling that I personally experienced on that day. This sensation was conveyed by creating a dark narrow space in the carcass of the cabinet, and inside that, a narrow space with three levels, just like the layout of the building. As for the shell of the cabinet, I wanted it to give a clear indication from where this idea was derived. The stand that goes with this piece is made to present it with as little visual interference as possible.

feather-board cabinet



After I finished the Feather-Board Cabinet the first thesis committee meeting took place. During the meeting, questions arose and suggestions were offered about making the Feather-Board Cabinet look more like the actual



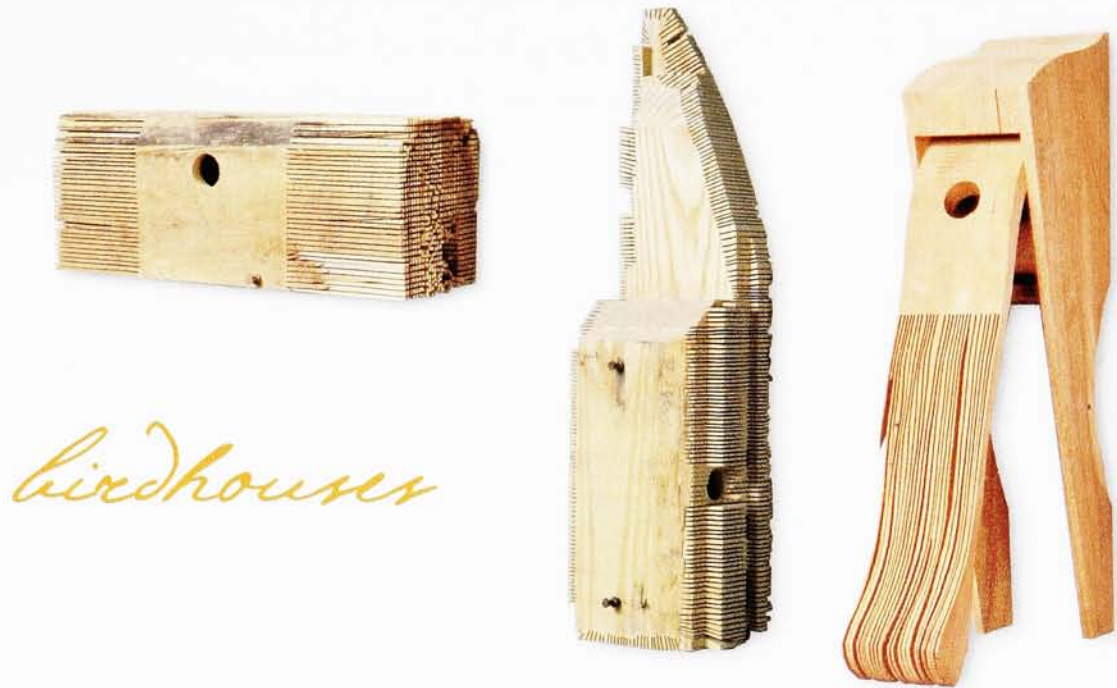
relic. The challenges for me were: how far to go with the piece, how to produce it, and how to set the boundaries of making the surface abuse look natural and not man-made. These are some questions that were left unanswered at my first committee meeting. In order to investigate and find answers to these questions, I chose to use the scraps from the Feather-Board Cabinet to make mini feather-board cabinets into box forms. These boxes were an experiment that answered some of the questions that were asked by the thesis committee. The boxes held the same characteristics as the mother cabinet in the overall form, but a different treatment was applied to the surface of each piece. The first attempt was to take the inner core scrap of the mother cabinet and treat it as a band-sawn box. Then the interior was given a slight elegance to it by adding leather. Adding leather gives viewers a visual push that further enhances their feelings of delight when they open the box. These boxes were to be executed in a quick fashion, so that there would be no personal attachment to them.



feather-board box

The Feather-Board Box, which is the smallest piece in this body of work, is the most successful one. It has everything that I looked for in a piece. I executed it rather quickly, which allowed for my ideas to be expressed more smoothly and expressively at the same time. The outside of the piece is simple and monotone with the use of mahogany, and is painted on the front and back. The feet that carry it are detailed in the same fashion as the top, with painted surfaces on two sides. The small black circle acts as a finger pull, and draws the viewers in, which then allows them to observe the interior of the piece. The interior is no disappointment to the viewer

as it has more to offer than the outside. The textured walls are amplified with a painted band sawn texture to compliment the outside of the box. Brown suede at the bottom of the box is the final needed touch because it pulls all the elements together. This piece does not disappoint me in the least because it was created with the intent to just be an experiment. The material that was used was third generation scrap from the first feather board. The time spent was very effective because it expressed my ideas clearly, which was to keep the details crisp, yet not overwhelming. However, I still found myself caring too much for them. I knew I had to distance myself from the project emotionally, and that is when I came up with the idea for the feather-board birdhouses.



The idea behind the birdhouses was to use nothing but scraps found around the studio that were from different species of wood. I found enough scraps to build eight birdhouses. Aided with the internet and some previous knowledge, I set out to make these birdhouses as simple as possible. I decided to make them without perching sticks to keep to the theme of simplicity. Only one hour was spent on each piece to fabricate it. I did this so that I would not linger on any one piece, and also to force myself to have less control over the technical aspects of the piece. At first, I made only three birdhouses out of the scrap wood. I then took about two weeks to give myself a chance to respond before I proceeded to make the remainder of the scrap into the rest of the birdhouses. These birdhouses became a series of experiments dealing with texture as a priority. I wanted the wood to be left natural to reflect the abuse that nature would do to these pieces. These birdhouses gave me what I was looking for and more. So many more ideas were generated from these experiments relating to surface textures, for example, than I had first anticipated.

My next big piece extended from my recollection of wooden pulleys I would often see on the farm. This new object gave my mind a fresh approach to what I was going to do next. As with every piece made before, it had to challenge me to find a new approach to craftsmanship and it had to further my knowledge. I decided the best way to approach the pulley was to "brick-lay" the forms. "Brick-lay" has many challenges that I never knew existed. To create a gapless joint was one of the biggest challenges that I faced and successfully accomplished. I first started out with one pulley form that was eighteen inches in diameter and was to be cut in half to make two small end tables. My idea was to make a small table that would fold to be out of the way when not in use, and then open up to produce a flat surface, just as drop-leaf tables are intended. To prevent an environment that I was accustomed to in my upbringing (with lots of clutter and an excess of stuff) these tables have little surface to allow for any type of clutter to build up. This was another important concept that went into the Pulley End Tables. When the table is closed it appears to be made of two half circles. When the support arms swing out and the leaves are in use, the circle is completed and the internal structure is exposed. The interior has a texture that I stumbled upon the year previous to my thesis year. This texture was created with a ball mill on a dremel or a die-grinder, depending on the size of the ball mill. The texture that is left behind is similar to a pitted, rusty metal surface under a magnifying glass. After the grinding was done, milk paint was then applied to intensify the detail. I ended up painting two coats of marigold and then two coats of green as the topcoat. As a minor but important detail, I went back to each crater with a ball mill stress and exposed the yellow

coat of paint. This idea came about when I was thinking about the natural wear and tear on my dad's farm equipment. A lot of his equipment could be seen with three-color variations, the finish paint, the primer, and (down to) the bare metal.



Pulley end tables

While in the process of making the Small Pulley End Table, a much larger table was beginning to take shape that was five feet in diameter. I called this the Large Pulley Table because it was taking on the same form as the smaller tables, both in shape and building process. This table was made from hard maple with the intention of building something that was light in color and more contemporary in feeling. It was originally designed to be a hallway table that would need to withstand the abuse that tight hallways create. Maple was an obvious choice of wood because of the durability it provides along with its lightness of color. This piece went through many radical changes from the original design. These changes came about when the piece was reevaluated at the end of the building stage and was free standing. In comparison to the work that was already created, the Large Pulley Table design needed to be grossly modified by removing all the unnecessary elements to make it go with the body of work already in progress. This was an important step for me as an artist because I was learning to do what was best for the design.

Pulley table



Having been created from two very different sources, the body of work was split in two, visually. It was critical to connect the pieces to create a full, unified body. To reinstate order and to create the final connection between the two different groups of work the Pulley Cabinet was the link. The cabinet hangs from two ropes off a smaller pulley. This is similar to a pulley found in a barn. An elongated cabinet form that hangs below the pulley shares the same characteristics as the first piece, the Feather-board cabinet. Rough and smooth textures, along with form, is what made the link between the two sources of objects. The outer skin has the same surface that is found in the Feather-board Cabinet "fins". As with the first piece, there were scraps from cutting the form out, which are called the "guts". By employing these scraps to make something else useful out of them, we have the same outcome from the Feather Board cabinet. These scraps, however, were used to create simpler pieces than the ones before, with the use of plain pivot hinging techniques. The boxes were painted with a variety of techniques with little investigation of finishes. In the end there was no personal attachment to the pieces and the project was considered a success in that way.



Pulley cabinet



– ARTISTIC VISION FOR FUTURE WORK –

In conclusion to my work at RIT, I participated in a meeting for the defense of my thesis. We met to reinforce what could be done to continue the direction of my work in a progressive move forward. We discussed how future pieces could be pushed forward from this body of work and felt, that these pieces were the platform for a new generation of ideas. Visually strong pieces such as the Pulley Table show that my work has a strong foundation, but many unresolved issues found in the Pulley Cabinet, both inside and out, are what need to be examined and further investigated. The pulley that essentially holds up the cabinet cuts off the visual flow of the outer shape of the piece, causing the eye to stop; therefore the piece isn't seen as a whole. A simple additive such as accenting the wood with a different species or a pigment would have balanced the bottom weight with the top weight. Recognizing these small details is a critical evaluation skill I need to develop further in order to enable the body of work to progress.

The pieces in my body of work seem to be at either end of the spectrum. It appears that what is lacking is an in-between piece that unites the larger to the smaller pieces of work. This piece would have features of quick execution, features that are found in the smaller pieces that show more immediate ideas, along with the craftsmanship that is found in the larger pieces. As for work in the future, it will develop more strongly with both of these features, because it will take the pieces into the middle of the spectrum.

My work also needs some visual improvement that should be dealt with from the beginning. For example, at the start of design on paper, the work needs to be approached from more than just the frontal view of the piece. If a design is going to progress in a more effective way it might be necessary to begin with sketching in three dimension; perhaps I need to break down each part of a design and approach it as if every side is the front, even in the smallest details of a piece.

Thinking that my work may never be entirely satisfying to me has given me the motivation to keep searching for that design that will give me the fulfillment of creating a truly satisfying piece.

