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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

Quest for Balance

by

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Abstract

This thesis project is documented in two separate parts. The first part consists of the exploration and execution of six sculptures. The second is in the form of a written thesis, which will discuss the transformation of an idea, my influences, a body of work and the beginning of a visual voice. This project centers on the idea of a visceral state versus an intellectual state as part of the human condition. My interest lies in the interaction between these two states and how we as individuals balance them. For this project I classified an intellectual state to revolve around our ability to think, reason and understand. A visceral state may not need any intellect, but proceeds from instinct rather than rational thoughts.

Introduction

Through physical and written exploration, I have discovered my own visual language, my process for creating, and the conceptual scope that it entails. I question my awareness of the way I think or act within reason and instinct. One scenario: I try to make decisions by what makes complete sense, the organized reasonable thing to do by concentrating on the logistics of the situation. Another solution is tuning into my emotions, honing in on my emotional well-being. Do I tend to focus on bodily emotions such as fear and anger, or intellectual emotions such as hope and pride? The definition for emotional intelligence is defined as “the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others.”¹ I view this definition as an integral part of being *at one* with yourself and your environment. I focused on a subtle psychological balance, and the control and awareness I have of this balance. It is important to have a balance, an emotional intelligence, between these outlooks. I looked inward, at my own methods of reasoning and instincts and how I use these two modes of thought in my life and in my choices. Do people reason with their emotions or do they reason with intellect? How much of a role do emotions play with intellect and the ability to reason? These questions set up the outline for discussion of my work, which incorporates compasses, teeter-totters, and scales with sections of the human body to portray an internal equilibrium. This oeuvre operates around a cycle, a state of balance, falling out of and obtaining a balance.

Finding My Own Language

During my first year of graduate school I focused on the figure, the physical space of the human body, how and why I used the human body in my work. Using multiples of one figure and breaking up the space of the body with color along with a multitude of bases and architectural structures defined my first year. I searched for a new style and aesthetic, a voice that allowed me to express my ideas. I studied the dynamics of commentary within the self versus the commentary within a group by arranging loosely defined model-sized figures. Twentieth century sculptors, Alberto Giacometti, George Segal, and Juan Muñoz provided me with structure and example for space, the figure, and composition.

One series I explored in my first year involved a doll-sized, loosely formed, generic male figure with a dowel through the hip encased by a ceramic frame. The relationship possibilities of this short series became the source of my ideas for balance. The game of making a monkey do flips in the air by squeezing two vertical wooden sticks inspired this form. Instead of recreating a game that one must manipulate, I turned the form into its own entity, where the figure within the frame either appears in control or unbalanced. It was no longer a game to play, but an environment for my art figure. With these pieces I explored the mental balancing act we all deal with, ranging from the times when we are in complete control to the times when we are not balanced. These pieces also explored our awareness of our own balancing act through the figure's awareness of the bar and the frame. This series took the figure out of the context of people living their lives and placed them into a contraption, relating *life* to a device that you may control.

At the beginning of this thesis project I was determined to abstract the human form to tailor to my ideas and aesthetic. I continued to search for the right form and abstraction of the body to relay my ideas. Contemporary artist, Juan Muñoz tries to avoid a complete form of naturalism in his sculpture: "The more realistic they are meant to be, the less interior life they have."² I needed to find the right way to abstract the body. The first idea to translate my thesis proposal was to place abstracted sections adjacent to defined sections within a proportional human body. The abstracted or unfocused areas would represent my emotions, or an emotional aspect of a human being. The anatomically correct, defined areas would represent an intellectual way of thinking, a more organized sense of thought, and a state of reason. My intent was to show a dialogue between two modes of thought and their balance through the abstraction of the human being through form and surface. I also searched for objects related to balance to incorporate with a figure: children's seesaws, scales and compasses. Unlike the human mind, these tools are capable of being balanced infinitely. By incorporating these modes of balance within the structure of the human body, I attempted to exhibit an internal balance. This struggle was finally resolved when I dismantled the body for my final pieces.

After several attempts to invent a new figure I started concentrating on the relationships I was trying to portray. I found evocative interactions between arranging my self-made objects. The

forms I developed and researched, objects of balance and the human body, could interact separately rather than as one abstract form. In examining the works of artist Ed Kienholz from the late 1950s to the early 1990s, specifically *Boy To Man*, I was drawn to the way he used components of the figure, an arm or torso, within his installations. (Fig. 1) Kienholz's genius is found within the art of assemblage. Working with objects typically found at garage sales and flea markets, he invented thrilling relationships between arbitrary objects of American culture. These complex installations of figure, object and space create an environment pregnant with interpretation and meaning. Thomas McEvilley, art historian and critic, writes:

In the Kienholz oeuvre, space, the figure, and narrativity turn curiously onto one another as if they were almost one – or one possible triangulation of forces somehow perilously remaining in balance. Space is the medium that enables the figure to exist; the figure, in turn, is the agent that activates space. Their collaboration, finally, is the necessary cause of the special situation in which narrative can occur: where event horizons explode into events.³

Although I was not ready to take on the complex compositions that I was attracted to in Kienholz's work, I felt his process was best to equip and translate my ideas. Bruce Nauman also uses a section of the body, heads and hands, although his pieces portray the inevitable and tolerated cruel actions of humans in the most straightforward way possible. Using only fragments of the body, his drawing and sculpture such as *Andrew Head/Andrew Head Reversed*, *Nose to Nose*, provides an example of the power of simple composition. (fig. 2) Viewing Nauman's and Kienholz's work provided me with a new process to translate my ideas and a visual language that suited my meaning.

I felt comfortable working with only a fragment of the body. Art historian and philosopher, Professor Dr. Andrei Gabriel Pleșu analyzes the fragment in art:

The most adequate "visual" expression of the spiritual effort seems to me to be in the fragment because only the fragment alone intimately respects the thought process. We think intermittently: literally intermittently, because of our innate ability to remain focused beyond the interval of a few hours. The positive outcome of this way of thinking is often fulgurant: there are flashes of understanding, surrounded by a probing buzz, which is nothing more than actively waiting for those moments to occur. But we think intermittently in another way too: we think about infinity in fragments of thought. To be a creature means to be a fragment.⁴

Pleşu provides a philosophy for my new found form and process, which legitimizes the fragment in my work.

After defining the objects of balance and fragments of the body I wanted to use, I arranged and rearranged them to investigate multiple possibilities. By keeping the original forms of the objects and the figure and interpreting how they related to each other as independent entities, I no longer needed to discover a new type of figure with its own identity. I placed life-sized body parts (heads, arms, and legs) with objects of balance to establish a visual language that suited my meaning. This process allows my work to be fluid and flexible for further translation and ideas. Similar to the process of poetry, I create my own vocabulary of specialized words to carefully position in simple, but strong compositions. I use my own words (objects) to create infinite possible sentences (sculptures). Now I have the freedom to speak, to poetically invent meaning through subtle relationships.

Speaking With the Figure

When using a loaded icon such as the figure within my art, I had to be aware of the multitude of associations to culture, race, gender, and religion. Can there be a universal figure? The figure has always been a part of my creative process. Stemming from my involvement in dance and competitive swimming, the movement of my body has been a prominent aspect of my accomplishments and happiness.

I was concerned with literally portraying myself in my work because I was hesitant to be labeled a female artist with feminist qualities. I did not want my work to be associated with a single gender, but rather the combination of both or the extraction of both. Virginia Woolf speaks of the success and importance of representing both genders, not just one within her book, *Orlando*. Sally Potter, director of the film *Orlando*, continues to divulge Woolf's writings. Author and critic Gary Indiana speak of how Potter and Woolf play with gender:

Virginia Woolf depicts gender in *Orlando* as a quality subject to sudden reversals, not simply in Orlando him/herself but mirrored in every character Orlando has relations with. Potter has muted the bisexual or pansexual ambiance of the story, evoking it instead through certain casting choices. ... One could argue that the film, perhaps

unintentionally, reinforces a conventional view of posterity as a matter of genetic reproduction, whereas for Woolf the important thing is the making of one's life work.⁵

Sally Potter comments on her translation of Woolf's *Orlando*:

I wanted to find ways of expressing whatever needed to be expressed, without resorting to polemics, partly because I think the effects are subtler and stronger when you avoid preaching. I also wanted to be true to Virginia Woolf's intentions--to suggest that the human species happens to have been divided into two genders for the purpose of reproduction and not for much else, and that it's perfectly possible and desirable for persons of the same sex (or opposite sex) to love and respect each other. It's a kind of gentle politics; in a sense, of course, Woolf's attitude was a product of her specific time, but I think what she says has a lot to give now, when gender politics have escalated to an almost violent level--when people have to hoist their sexuality up a flagpole to claim their identity.⁶

During my own research on Potter's film *Orlando* and Virginia Woolf's writings I acquired and recognized a deep respect for not preaching polemics and differences between people.

As a result I explored the idea of an androgynous figure (either sexless or a combination of both) and an anonymous figure within my work. I was attracted to other works that were not about gender specifics. The work of Magdalena Abakanowicz, Stephen De Staebler and Virginia Woolf became universal through androgynous and ambiguous sculptural and literary forms. De Staebler's says his work is associated "with the male-female polarity and [its influence on] the form of the body. All of my figures are either androgynous or nonsexual. Often, you do not know whether it is a male or a female figure. Or, if you see that it is a male figure, you see that it is also female."⁷ Barbara Rose describes what I admire about Abakanowicz's work:

All of Abakanowicz's figurative sculptures intentionally lack gender differentiation. Once again we find ourselves in a border zone of blurred definitions. This open-endedness is deliberate, because the artist does not believe in closed, finite and easy identifications. Her experiences taught her that human characteristics and behavior constitute a gray spectrum far more complex than the simple polarities of black and white.⁸

A lack of gender and character association is important to my work in general, however it was not at the forefront of my thesis ideas. My indecision about the identity of my figures created a lack of sensible cohesiveness in my work. Although I was not interested in self-portraiture, I researched how other artists used themselves in their work. I discovered that one can use their self as the object, but not the subject. Self-portraiture is when the artist is the subject within the

work, whether they are the object or they choose something else to portray them. This became clear to me when I separated the objects in my sculpture from the subject of my ideas. I resolved the issue by using myself as the object, while my ideas remained the subject. I did not have to defend my decisions for whom the figure represented because the piece represented my ideas and was a representation of my own form. The heads and arms remained androgynous in the end, which allowed my feelings toward gender to come through subconsciously.

Speaking From Experience

My environment, my mental space, and my eagerness to learn motivate me. The academic environment of graduate school provided an open and challenging setting for my art and ideas. The social environment served as a catalyst for ideas, emotions, and discoveries in my work. It affected my life and work by giving me a close-knit community that forced me to evaluate my self and my art. Jeanette Winterson, a British contemporary writer and art lover, describes why the process and making of the object is the most thrilling:

The true artist is interested in the art object as an art process, the thing in being, the being of the thing, the struggle, the excitement, the energy, they have found expression in a particular way. The true artist is after the problem.⁹

Graduate school allowed me to become an artist full time, to problem solve my ideas, my process, and my physical forms on a daily basis. This was exhilarating; although I felt my work was struggling and not successful, I knew the results of my exploration would provide me with a stronger mind for creating. I have new faith and energy to translate my ideas into form.

Knowing this community existed made me realize the difference in myself at grad school versus before. I was accustomed to constraining my emotions from the lack of a trustworthy outlet. In an academic environment I did not have to think rationally toward my artwork. There was no room to be self-conscious within my art, which survives on personal experience. I was forced to express myself to my colleagues and question everything I was doing within my work. Because I felt more comfortable expressing myself, I noticed how little I paid attention to my emotions. The importance of the self and self-awareness came to the forefront of my ideas. I realized a play between rational thinking and my emotions. That was what I needed to balance! Balance is

within everyone's lives, and their balance is individual. I discovered this within myself, and it is what has fueled my work over the past two years.

My Vocabulary

Working with clay was the first inspiration that motivated me to create. Clay has the capacity for a broad range of surface qualities and form. I am most attracted to how it responds to my hand and how it communicates gesture. Stephen De Staebler, a contemporary ceramic sculptor, describes a similar attraction, "The thing that I respond mostly in clay was its power to perform randomly. You could let it do what it wanted to do. It has this great power to receive order, but also to persist in its randomness."¹⁰ The expressive quality of clay for me is best in a raw state, when it is wet and the surface is not defined. I can provide structure in the form to portray a body part, but loosely enough to keep the idea of clay within the piece. The adaptability of clay allows me to tailor the surface of my form through texture, definition, and glaze in order to communicate the complexity of the human condition.

Using other materials in this thesis project, such as wood, wire and wax, allowed me to customize and execute my ideas for these sculptures. A wooden teeter-totter provided a straight and tailored form to contrast with its ceramic counterparts. Paraffin wax and wax medium served as a topcoat for my sculpture without reacting to the metallic glazes on the surface. The wax provided another layer, a different tactile quality, and a translucent surface. The execution of my ideas and form is most important along with retaining the quality of clay within each piece.

In order to communicate an inner, cerebral quality within the self I chose to use a head that was white (pure) with simplified features through layers of slip. The final layer of wax provides a translucent look and feel, which alludes to innerness. The smooth white head exemplifies a calm inner organized thought (reason), similar to the process of making it. When creating these heads I focused on all features of the face, carefully defining each one at a time.

To contrast this quiet internal state, I created a head that was not defined, expressed by hand gesture and facial expression. The corporeal quality of this head focuses on the raw state and

color of the terracotta clay-body. Loosely defined gestured features define the emotional. This process (keeping the features loose) reflects my instincts in using clay because I am not thinking and planning each feature of the face. I promoted the idea of cerebral vs. physical by juxtaposing objects that are layered in slip vs. the initial coarse surface. Metallic glazes used on some body parts and scales reference a heaviness, permanence, and weight. I altered these decisions to tailor to my idea as well as the aesthetic needs of the sculpture. They are all versions of my head and my mental states.

Instruments of balance provided the environment for my figures to communicate a relationship. The form of the teeter-totter provided a way to compare two modes of thought, show the strength of one and represent a balancing act. The teeter-totter is stripped of childlike qualities, only standing for the core idea of balance. A compass is a device for finding one's direction, a sense of personal direction, and the scope of something such as a subject or area.¹¹ When I combined the form of a figure and a compass, the compass became a symbol for an internal tool, a sense of personal direction. The hanging scale in *Motive, Wisdom, Anger, Thought*, is based on Pompeii steelyards and weights from the classical Roman period and 18th century coin scales from Norway. These ancient scales were a part of trade, but also reflected the culture through decoration and the form of the weight. They are a symbol for the values of ancient society and commerce. Weights from Pompeii resembled mythical characters and deities. This form allowed me to weigh multiple objects as well as deal with the weight and the “universal” measurement for my invented weight. The form of American egg scales from the 1930s and 1940s portray a daily household utensil. These tools of measurement also served as a structure and base for my figures.

Sentences In Form

These pieces quietly play with reason and instinct, intellect and emotion. Within this series, sections of the body (the head, the arms) interact with forms of measurement to suggest the balance that we strive for within ourselves. The body parts become objects of their own displaying control or a lack thereof.

These pieces are quiet. Personally I approach things for better or for worse in a quiet manner. These sculptures portray a subtle relationship, one that is elementary at first glance, but retains multiple interpretations. Each object has a strong sense of relationship with its counterpart, whether it is a head laying on a scale or a hand gripping the end of a teeter-totter. The relationship between the body parts and the objects is important.

Scales, compasses and teeter-totters are meant to move in order to operate. Like these inanimate objects, the psyche will always waiver. We are never infinitely balanced. There is a cyclic process for balancing, the state of being balanced, a time for becoming balanced, and a time when we lose our balance. The sculptures reference movement, but remain stationary, only to reveal a snapshot of action.

The Teeter-Totter Series

Beside One's Self marks the beginning of the "teeter-totter" series. (fig. 3) These pieces incorporate multiple heads or arms with a teeter-totter. They are each a moment within the cycle of balance; being in balance, falling out of balance, and falling into balance. The composition of *Beside One's Self* shows a comparison of two different mental states of mine. Meaningfulness for my mind and meaningfulness for my heart are separate. I put energy into certain parts of my life. I need to put the same amount of concentration and energy toward my emotional wellbeing. Different aspects of life require different modes of concentration and attention.

Beside One's Self involves two versions of the same life-size heads, which lay on their ears beside one another on a four-foot long wooden teeter-totter form. The teeter-totter is weighted on the right hand side where the two heads are laying head to head and facing the same direction. The heads are separate but in dialogue with each other on a form that deals implicitly with balance. Similar only in shape, they are opposite in look and feel. The white head is covered with layers of slip hiding the true defined head beneath. Detailed features of the head create an uneven surface for the slip to cover, causing the slip to crack while it dried. Simplifying the head's features implies a sense of calmness. White layers of slip reference the deeper-layer, while calling attention to a peaceful internal quality of thought and reason. The other head appears heavy

and bronze-like, standing for a mental state, which is more rooted with emotion. I associated the thought of emotions as a burden and heavy on the soul. Although the surface remains expressive, the features are clear. In comparison to the obscured open eyes of the white head, the eyes of the bronze head are closed, alluding to a passive role. The teeter-totter and dark head metal are similar in color, which offsets the white head. Minimal and geometric, the wooden teeter-totter exaggerates the difference in material between itself and the heads, which removes the connection between them.

I envision the teeter-totter pieces moving. These sculptures are a snapshot of movement, representing only one aspect of my vision. I imagine this piece reacting to that movement if it was stopped; the metal head would have slid down to the opposite end toward the white head. It also reveals more power in the white head, forcing the metal head to slide to the other side. Placed lower on the teeter-totter, the white head appears heavier. It is the focal point of the piece because of the white color. I wanted there to be more communication between the positions of the heads. Their ears are pressed close to the teeter-totter as if to listen, to attain an understanding and awareness. By trying to be *in tune* with the teeter-totter, the two heads bring attention to the play between two states.

Tremor represents the strength involved in my internal search for balance. (fig. 4) I try to control my life and how I am feeling; it is a physical and mental struggle. My arms tremble when I am at the capacity of my physical strength. When I am at the end of my understanding for my emotions, my mind becomes anxious for resolution. Balancing demands a mental and physical concentration. It involves being aware of both sides at all times, as well as being aware of your center.

The main focus of *Tremor* is two slightly larger than life-size arms, gripping a white three-foot long teeter-totter. The surface of the arms is expressive and gestured with rough and undefined details. They are the color of steel and tip the teeter-totter to one side. Referencing lightness and pureness, the teeter-totter is wooden and painted white. It is unaffected by the arms and their struggle creating a powerful comparison between the illusion of heavy, forceful steel arms and a light base. The hands grip each end of the teeter-totter showing both their control and struggle

for balance. *Tremor* is displayed at a height similar to an adult generating a more physical reaction toward the piece and allowing the viewer to feel the struggle within his or her body.

Beside One's Self is a comparison, *Tremor* is the strength of balancing, *She Falls Down* is a state of unbalance. Although *She Falls Down* suggests the act of falling, it is only a moment within this action. (fig. 5) The moment represented in this piece is a state of anxiety, during the times in my life when I do not have control of my feelings, when there are no answers.

She Falls Down is composed of four heads made of unglazed terra cotta clay, each similar in form and aesthetic. The features are incomplete, but fresh and accurate. Each head is pinned down to a teeter-totter at different angles to suggest that they are rolling. The color of the terra-cotta clay is warm and rich, as its name suggests. The unglazed surfaces of the heads retain rich qualities against the cool, minimal, steel-like teeter-totter, highlighting the relationship and difference between these objects. The heads stand for a state of life, while the teeter-totter represents the constant role of balance within one's life.

Intimate Balance

The two sculptures, *Bereft of Reason* and *Motive, Wisdom, Anger, Thought*, incorporate a different form of balance, a weighing scale, with heads. (fig.6 & 7) Once I established a visual vocabulary in the teeter-totter pieces, I freed my mind of exact associations to make the scale pieces. By working intuitively, my meanings and ideas came through inherently. *Bereft of Reason* involves two rusty white ceramic egg scales placed, each weighing one head in the shape of an egg. The scales are placed so that the heads are lying side by side, as in *Beside One's Self*. The heads being compared are the same size and shape of an egg, but the color of bronze imparting heaviness and mass. One head is smooth, while the other remains gestured. I associated the pure whiteness of a head with reason and clear thought. The two heads in *Bereft of Reason* are dark and visceral.

These small intimate pieces create subtle relationships of human balance among the intricate mechanics of antique scales. *Bereft of Reason* sets up a comparison, similar to *Beside One's Self*, but with different implied relationships. An egg scale is controlled with your hands and is meant for

one egg, in the case of the sculpture, for one head or self. Teeter-totters require the use of your whole body and are meant for two people or objects as in this series. The egg scale is a utensil for measurement intended for daily use in the kitchen. The banality of this object and its use portrays a common occasion for balancing an egg and oneself. The egg brings along associations with regeneration and the possibility for growth.

Hanging scales from classical Roman times influenced the form used in *Motive, Wisdom, Anger, and Thought*. Weights in the shape of deities were one of the many shapes used as well as animals. Although the scale is old-fashioned, the hanging head weights are contemporary in form, translucent and generic. The weights are pure looking from layers of slip and wax simplifying the facial features. They suggest a temporality or weightlessness to them, new minds resting on an old machine. The tray holds multiple heads imposing the idea of a crowd, referencing various modes of thought or a group coming together to balance the clean emotionless white weights. The heads on the plate have more realistic features (hair), and imply rusty, used objects.

I resolved my earlier issue of using the whole figure by working on a small-scale and abstracting part of the figure to resemble a compass, a tool. What makes this size work as a piece and not a model is how it is displayed. *Degrees of Reason* is composed of seven compass figures (a loosely defined figure with one of its legs and half of its torso a compass) representing the strength and answers within our self, our own inner balance. (fig. 8) Each figure is mounted to stand on the wall in a line about a foot within each other. The length between their feet grows in width suggesting the radius of a possible circle. The group is showing an action or pursuit at different degrees, and the white one has succeeded; a black circle marks the path of the foot as if it was drawing its own path.

Once installed and lighted, each figures caste multiple shadows creating another *crowd* beneath the piece. This element brought an unexpected element of *time* to the forefront. The compass is a tool for measurement, accuracy, and a balanced circle. The compass figure is a symbol for internal balance, your own tool to help yourself, an instrument that reveals your internal balance through its mark, whether a rough circle, a light sketch, symmetrical or asymmetrical. The mark of the compass becomes the mark of internal balance.

Influential People

The artists that I studied throughout this experience guided me with their process and their use of the human form. By providing me with models for figurative sculpture, I acquired elements to consider when creating my own art figure such as spatial awareness within and around the figure, the relationship with its environment or base, the position and posture of the figure, and the importance, for me, of abstraction and material.

Like the works of Antony Gormley, Franz Walther, and Bruce Nauman, I want my work to have a physical affect on the viewer, whether by a feeling or awareness. Franz Erhard Walther uses the body in his art without aggression or injury, but in a systematic and fundamental approach. Manfred Schneckenburger, art historian and critic, writes of Walther's work: "It is the experience of actually handling the material that constitutes the work of art. Textile books, sacks, bags, covers, strips and steel planes, bars, angles or box-like fabric niches, garments fixed to the wall, determine certain attitudes, movements, counter-movement, attraction, repulsion, contact and distance."¹² Walther's piece *Straight Line, Semi-Circle, Same Length* consists of two flat structures, called tracks, of steel about 15 inches in width and a short wall or rim on one side. (fig. 9) One is straight while the other is a semi-circle; a person stands straight with their hands at their side on each track with their heels along the rim. Schneckenburger, through his description of Walther, mentions similar explorations I experienced with my own sculpture.

Working in the 60s, Walther made a very clear early inroad into the concept of sculpture as an instruction to act, in which physical awareness, and the sense of "being at one with oneself" or "with oneself" becomes states in which to experience a sense of inner calm.¹³

Antony Gormley, using a simplified featureless human form to explore the physical internal space of the human body in site-specific locations, reveals how sculpture can force the viewer to become aware of their own physical space and body. Seams within his unrefined cast-iron figures naturally divide the form. Whether they are simply standing straight as in *Parallel Field* or in contorted positions as in *Critical Mass*, Gormley's figures encourage me to slowly take a deep breath, to take in my own environment, and to reflect on my own space and self. (fig.10 & 11) I associate this physical sensation with my piece, *Tremor*, illustrating when I am most aware of the physical strength it takes to become balanced. Gormley states,

I question the notion that retinal response is the only channel of communication in art, and the notion that objects are discrete entities. I want the work to activate the space around it and engender a psycho-physical response, allowing those in its field of influence to be more aware of their bodies and surroundings.¹⁴

George Segal highlights the importance of mundane social situations in our lives using all-white figures in realistic installations. By placing ghost-like white figures in natural public arenas such as a diner or a movie theatre, the work enhances the internal aspect of being human. Even in mundane situations, we are separate from our environment, within ourselves. The banality of the configured situations compels the viewer to focus on the figure in its solitude. Segal encouraged me to study the mundane and everyday situations in my life and how to use them within my work.

Albert Giacometti's work, both two and three dimensional, provided me with lyrical examples of spatial relationships that involved the figure. Additionally, the abstraction and reduction of his figurative forms helped to direct me toward using those essential human features that could best convey my ideas. Manfred Schneckenburger analyzes Giacometti's discoveries:

We perceive each other merely as an "apparition" surrounded by space within a certain field of vision and perspectively reduced. The mode of perception, long an accepted component of painting, was one that Giacometti was determined to transpose in to the field of sculpture. ... Why should a human being seem more real in the distance than in close-up? ... It was not distance, but encounter, its directness and intensity, that were the focal point [for Giacometti].¹⁵

Taking these key elements into consideration helped me experiment with a new figurative form during my first year. Not only was I trying to loosen up my surface, I wanted to understand how posture and form affected the art figure and how it related to other figures and their environment.

Juan Muñoz's installation "Square," revealed to me a way to relay the awareness and unawareness of the self within a group, the feeling of isolation in a crowd. (fig. 12) This piece involves a multiple of one life-size figure, an Asian man smiling and engaged, placed in a large group. Two of these figures are separated, but still in conversation and smiling as well. The placement of these figures, the similarity between them, and their gestures all play a role in the level of interpretation. I focus on the physical dynamics of Juan Muñoz's work when exploring

my own ideas of commentary within the self versus commentary within a group, how we communicate with ourselves versus with others. Muñoz's subtle abstracted elements within the human form provide enough natural detail for the viewer to relate to, and enough mystery to introduce a new reality. Olga Viso writes about the special interaction between the viewer and Muñoz's work:

Caught in a space between thought and action, the beholder of Muñoz's art seems abandoned and open to the uncertain gaze of others. Yet as Lynne Cooke so aptly stated, the spectator in Muñoz's art is not exposed to the uncompromising look of others as much as he or she is subjected to a more disturbing process of introspection—what Cooke described as the “specularity of the divided self.” Acting as a type of mirror that reflected the viewer's psyche, Muñoz's installations of the 1990s propelled the subject, as well as the viewer's gaze, inward and outward, stimulating an endless cycle of vision and perception that began and ended with the viewer. Whether left completely alone, as in *No.9*, or accompanied by a large group of figures, as in *Many Times*, the spectator in Muñoz's art remained distant and vulnerable—susceptible not only to the artist's calculated shifts in physical and perceptual space but also to the powers of the beholder's own anxieties and imaginings.¹⁶

I envision my ideas and work falling in this subject of the divided self and the viewer's interaction.

Magdalena Abakanowicz and Stephen De Staebler use the figure within their work to speak of the existence of mankind as well as the importance of the materials they use. Abakanowicz's work relays the power of the crowd versus De Staebler, whose work conveys isolation and the fragility of being human. Both artists abstract the body to stand for a universal message and statement about the human condition. De Staebler's figures of stone and bone-like fragmented clay are usually encased in a segmented earth-like structure. They are shown as standing or sitting individuals, sometimes in pairs. (fig. 13) Abakanowicz, who grew up in Poland during World War II, recognizes the power of the mind in history and the delicate balance of emotion and intellect on a larger context.

I suspect that under the human skull, instincts and emotion overpower the intellect without us being aware of it.¹⁷

Although the brain isn't an entity—one has to be aware of these different centers of power. They cause continuing and permanent struggle between wisdom and madness, between dream and reality in our nature. Art is a product in this struggle.¹⁸

Within each series, *Crowd I*, *Seated Figures*, and *Becalmed Beings*, Abakanowicz plays with structured formations and the form of her figure through burlap and bronze. (fig. 14, 15, 16) Both artists create work that is grotesque in structure and graceful in form.

Stephen De Staebler and Magdalena Abakanowicz showcase the intricate importance of the material they use to create their sculpture. By dipping burlap in resin, Abakanowicz creates headless androgynous bodies of intricate systems generated within the fabric. De Staebler's figures are made up of cast negative and positive body parts, abstracted to resemble the layers of the earth. The surface and structure of Abakanowicz and DeStaebler's figures successfully reveal the significance of their material, fabric and clay.

Conclusion

Jeanette Winterson speaks of the process of making, viewing, reading, and living with art. She expresses the importance and power of the artist:

Control over her material means control over more than ideas and passions, to feel something acutely, to know something thoroughly is no guarantee of expression. The artist has a peculiar problem; the strength of emotion necessary to hold together any large piece of work, the heat needed to keep the material supple, can itself fight with the detachment and serenity demanded to make the highly personal voice of the artist into a voice that seems to speak to all. And speak to all, not through a megaphone at a distance, but up close, into the ear. Art is intimacy, lover's talk, and yet it is a public declaration.¹⁹

Winterson describes what I strive to succeed at within my work and process. This is at the core of creating a body of work, or at least the one necessary for my thesis work. When I am creating art it forces me to be true to my ideas and the importance of self-expression. I am working for myself, and for the view of the public. I have a profound and sincere respect for the historical and current role of art in society.

These past two years mark a discovery in my work and myself, a growth that has propelled my ideas, sculpture, and process. I leave behind this experience with confidence; I do not have all the answers, but I have a mind to find them. Now I live close to New York City, which fuels my mind with infinite art and artists who require concentration and study. I slowly discover the

enchantment behind all art, not only what I am attracted to. I begin my new exploration with the *divided self* in a small studio in Brooklyn.

- Figure 1. Walter Hopps. Keinholz: A Retrospective (D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 1996), 231.
- Figure 2. *Bruce Nauman: 1985-1996 Drawings, Prints, and Related Works*, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997, 65.
- Figure 9. Christiane Fricke, Klaus Honnef, Karl Ruhrberg, Manfred Schneckenburger, Art in the 20th Century (Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, 2000), 552.
- Figure 10. *Antony Gormley*, Centro Galego De Arte Contemporanea, 2002, 95.
- Figure 11. John Hutchinson, E.H. Gombrich, Lela B. Njatin, W.J.T. Mitchell, Antony Gormley (Phaidon Press Limited), 172.
- Figure 12. Neal Benezra, Olga M. Viso, Juan Muñoz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 45.
- Figure 13. Donald Kuspit, Stephen De Staebler: The Figure (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1987), .
- Figure 14, 15, 16. Barbara Rose, Magdalena Abakanowicz (New York, Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1994), 130, 52, 77.

End Notes

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- ¹ J.D. Mayer, D. Caruso, & P. Salovey, (1999). Emotional intelligence meets traditional standards for an intelligence. *Intelligence*, 27, 267-298.
- ² Neal Benezra, Olga M. Viso, Juan Muñoz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 43.
- ³ Walter Hopps. Keinholz: A Retrospective (D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 1996), 52.
- ⁴ Andrei Plesu, *Tetzcani Diary*, Editura Humanitas, 2003, 81-82.
- ⁵ Gary Indiana, "Spirits either sex assume – interview with film director Sally Potter," *ArtForum*, summer, June 22, 1993.
- ⁶ Gary Indiana, "Spirits either sex assume – interview with film director Sally Potter," summer 1993.
- ⁷ Donald Kuspit, Stephen De Staebler: The Figure (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1987), 26.
- ⁸ Barbara Rose, Magdalena Abakanowicz (New York, Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1994), 94.

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- ⁹ Jeanette Winterson, Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery, 12.
- ¹⁰ Donald Kuspit, Stephen De Staebler: The Figure, 17.
- ¹¹ Encarta® World English Dictionary (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 1999).
- ¹² Christiane Fricke, Klaus Honnef, Karl Ruhrberg, Manfred Schneckenburger, Art in the 20th Century (Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, 2000), 553.
- ¹³ Manfred Schneckenburger, Art in the 20th Century, 553.
- ¹⁴ John Hutchinson, E.H. Gombrich, Lela B. Njatin, W.J.T. Mitchell, Antony Gormley (Phaidon Press Limited), 122.
- ¹⁵ Manfred Schneckenburger, Art in the 20th Century, 487.
- ¹⁶ Neal Benezra, Olga M. Viso, Juan Muñoz, 177.
- ¹⁷ At Work,
- ¹⁸ Barbara Rose, Magdalena Abakanowicz, 44.
- ¹⁹ Jeanette Winterson, Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1995), 70.

Figure 1.
Edward Kienholz
Boy To Man, 1990
metal, wood, plaster casts, taxidermied
duck, doll's head, body, teacup, fork,
mirror, paint, and polyester resin
36 x 68 x 12 inches



Figure 2.
Bruce Nauman
*Andrew Head/Andres Head Reversed,
Nose to Nose*, 1990
cast wax
11 x 17-1/2 x 8 inches



Figure 3.
Holly Brown
Beside One's Self, 2004
ceramic, wood, wax
18 x 48 x 6 inches



Figure 4.
Holly Brown
Tremor, 2004
ceramic and wood
36 x 36 x 6 inches

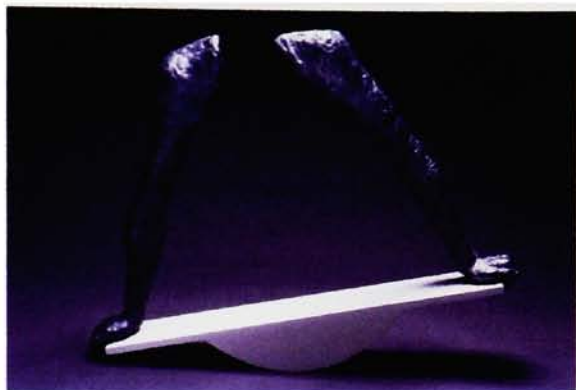


Figure 5.
Holly Brown
She Falls Down, 2004
ceramic, wood, hardware
18 x 54 x 6 inches



Figure 6.
Holly Brown
Bereft of Reason, 2004
ceramic
8 x 12 x 2 inches



Figure 7.
Holly Brown
Wisdom, Motive, Argue, Thought, 2004
ceramic, wire, wax
18 x 18 x 6 inches



Figure 8.
Holly Brown
Degrees of Reason, 2004
ceramic, wax
inches

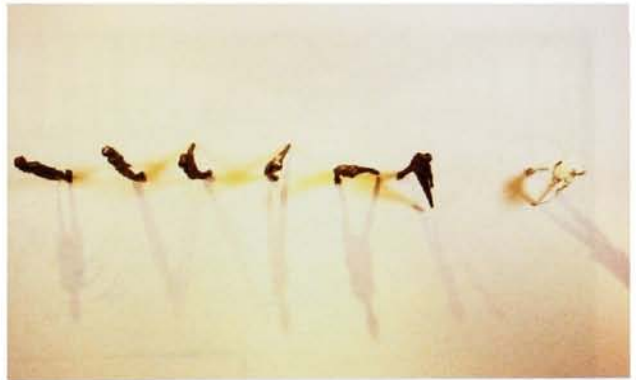


Figure 9.
Franz Erhard Walther
Work Demonstration I,
Working Aggregate, 1971



Figure 10.
 Antony Gormely
Paralell Field, 1990
 cast iron
 2 elements: 192 x 46 x 35 cm

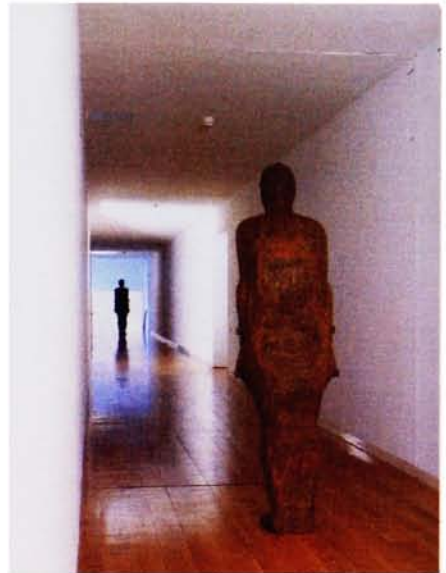


Figure 11.
 Antony Gormely



Figure 12.
 Juan Munoz
Square (Madrid) (detail), 1996
 resin and pigment
 dimensions variable



Figure 13.
Stephen De Staebler
Right Sided Woman Sitting, 1985
Stoneware clay
63-1/2 x 21 x 25 inches



Figure 14.
Magdalena Abakanowicz
Crowd I, 1986-87
Burlap and resin
50 standing figures, each approx.
5'7" high



Figure 15.
Magdalena Abakanowicz
Becalmed Beings, 1992-93
Bronze, 40 figures
Each one from 33 x 24 x 30 to
37 x 26 x 33 inches

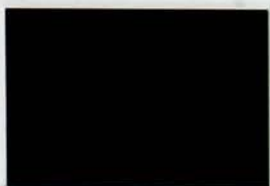


Figure 16.
Magdalena Abakanowicz
Seated Figures, 1974-79
Eighteen burlap and resin figures
each approx. 41 x 20 x 26 inches
Steel stands, each 30 x 18-1/4 x 8-3/4 inches





Holly Nora Brown
Tremor, 2004
Earthenware, wood 36"x36"x6"



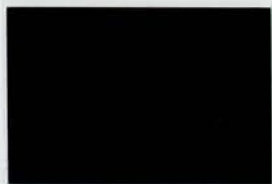
Holly Nora Brown
Tremor (detail), 2004
Earthenware, wood 36"x36"x6"



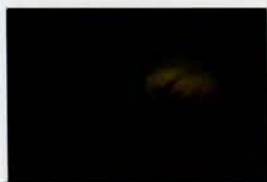
Holly Nora Brown
She Falls Down, 2004
Earthenware, wood 18"x54"x6"



Holly Nora Brown
She Falls Down (detail), 2004
Earthenware, wood 18"x54"x6"



Holly Nora Brown
Beside One's Self, 2004, 18x48x6
Earthenware, wood, wax



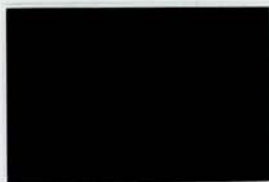
Holly Nora Brown
Beside One's Self (detail), 2004
Mixed Media, 18"x48"x6"



Holly Nora Brown, 2004
Wisdom, Motive, Argue, Thought
Earthenware, wood 18"x18"x6"



Holly Nora Brown
Bereft of Reason, 2004,
Earthenware, 8"x12"x2"



Holly Nora Brown
Degrees of Reason, 2004
Earthenware, wax 8"x12"x2"



Holly Nora Brown
Degrees of Reason (detail), 2004
Earthenware, wax 8"x12"x2"



Holly Nora Brown
Degrees of Reason (detail), 2004
Earthenware, wax 8"x12"x2"

