

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

Joyride

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Prologue

Avalanches of aerated alchemy appear alien and adrenocorticotrophic. Big blobs blast over bumps, boops, and beeps. Creamy chromium covers cavity and crack, cancel caution for a chance to capture celebration. Dripping drops droop decadently, as eccentric enzymes erupt with emotion and eutectics express existence for epochs. Flirt with familiarity through fused flint furniture. Goopy gobs and gibby gops, gargantuan glaze grandeur makes Nick giddy. Hides of high heat honey handsomely hugs handle and hip. Iron interwoven inside ingredients inches impulsively. Jazzy junk and joyful jelly jovially bejewels jungle-like jurisdictions on a jumping joyride down jar and joint. Kaleidoscope kitchens and kindergarden kingdoms.

Lumpy landscapes of luscious lime and luxurious lavender. Metaphorical mountainous mixtures move immodestly, matte maelstroms make masks of mauve muck mayhem. Nickel nabs nature in nebulous necklaces like neon nectar. Obscene ounces of oxide ooze over objects opposite of ordinary. Philosopher of phenomenon, passion picks the path of potassium to pool ponds on practical pots. Quote your quirk in a quantity of quartz quagmires. Righteous raspberry reactions race over rubble and rock, roaring rivers red with romance run rebelliously round.

Stoneware slumps and stormy staccatos of swarming suspensions swath slabs and surge subjects. Tango with transparent turquoise typhoons that travel and tour over table and teapot. Usher up the universe in uniform umbrellas of urgent utility. Viscous velvet volcanos venture on vampire vessels and vacation to veldts of volume and vibrant vermilion. Whispers of wacky whimsy waltz and weave over webs of weeping wax and wonky ware. Xerothermic xenoblasts and xiphoids form xanthous xysts. Yearn for yellow yolks and yodeling yo-yo's of yawning yummy yoghurt. Zippers of zany zinc zigzag zealously towards zones of zesty zombie zapping zeniths.

Joyride

A rectangular handle transforms into interlocked leafy scales and a cylindrical interior warps and bulges as if a scarab from *The Mummy* is crawling beneath its surface. Thick batter-like splats of raucous color melt and flow together as the mouth salivates, confused and yearning for a taste. An armchair appears to have contracted psychedelic leprosy and is coated in piles of foaming moss green and dripping coral red. A mug sports a sled instead of a foot-ring, and its elongated volume is flooded with a pool of glassy ice, submerged white orbs poke out from the unyielding yet revealing surface. The parts are all there, a handle to hold, a lip to drink from, a protruding armrest, yet they are all tweaked and mutated. The object is recognizable but is pushed so far from its archetype that it appears alien.

Function is in my DNA. When I say function I think of an object that has been made to be interacted with to perform a part in a specific activity. A painting functions, but does not fall under this definition as its function functions without there being any physical interaction or ritual that involves more than the object and the viewer. A cup carries out its function not by



itself but within a system. For example, a cup requires a beverage and a person to drink said beverage in order to function.

The systems and rules that are intrinsic to my definition of function can seem very limiting. Such a clear definition of an object as a 'cup' appears to restrict it to be one thing. I do not agree with this. Picture a limousine; a limousine is essentially a stretched out car. A limo functions in

the same way that a normal car does, it just has a bit extra. This excess is what makes limos the vehicle of choice to those in transit to the Oscars and speaks boisterously to the revelry and celebration that accompanies the moments that limos are ridden in.

'Kite' - Porcelain and Glaze - April 2019

The act of sitting in a chair or drinking from a cup is often invisible and forgotten due to its mundanity and frequency. These are the moments which I subvert through my mutated everyday objects. Through my work's invitation for physical interaction comes temperature, textures rubbing against the skin, bulbous forms intruding on the body, colors and subtle sounds and synesthetic connections to taste and smell. The senses are totally engaged. Once the jolt of experience fades there comes the exploration and consideration of the object. What was confined to the visual opens up to the visceral.

An idea has been coalescing in my mind over the past few weeks. It's possible I have been considering what my work derives from in the wrong light. I have watched it change from poorly made, convention seeking, soda fired cups and mugs to deliberately made, aberrantly formed, lusciously electric vessels that retain only vestigial remnants of their orange-peeled ancestors. Through this evolution I have come to the conclusion that I utilize familiarity as a vehicle to gain access to others; a recognizable core with an alien shell. This is one of the driving thoughts behind my venture into ceramic furniture. The parallels between cups and chairs are so numerous it feels very natural to explore the latter. The archetype of an armchair is perhaps even stronger and more clearly defined than that of a cup, and its draw and impact via interaction has the potential to catalyze the shock and allure due to its scale and preposterousness. One of my goals in creating alien versions of familiar things is to encourage my viewers to realize the importance of those frequently mundane moments where one interacts with cups and chairs.

The slowly burning epiphany currently enveloping my mind is likely the next evolution of this idea. There is one piece in my exhibition, *The Lounge*, that came out of considering the crux of what makes a chair a chair. *The Lounge* stems from what a body experiences when sitting in a chair, rather than a mutation of the appearance of a chair. Making it felt like building a cup from the inside out.



Linda Sikora in The Lounge during Thesis Defense

I now feel excited to make work that derives from the experience of objects rather than the appearance of them. I am pondering on an alternate way for objects to function. As Linda Sormin says, “sitting in a way we are not trained to.”

This is the idea that has me most excited for the near future. Take this with a grain of soda ash however as it seems that I go through a major change in the direction of my work every six months. For now I am dreaming of furniture such as low elongated landscapes of tessellating clay and glaze meant to prop one who is lying on the floor, wall mounted arms and platforms to lean into during casual hallway conversation, swimming pool couches and suspended laundry baskets. I am totally enthralled by the idea of making objects that function in a way that has never been experienced or considered before. With these objects I seek out a new species of joy.

My relationship with form is a bit like a situation where a chicken lays an egg in a duck’s nest. The duck will hatch and love the chick and take care of it but will never really know it and will always have a strange relationship with it. Form is the chick and I am the duck. My growth in form may have been stunted because I fell in love with substantial glazes before my appreciation or sense of form was fully developed.¹ Substantial glazes have their own form and I found that I could dramatically change forms I had

made out of clay by using glaze. Glaze allows me to put the form where it needs to be when I can’t get there while building. However, I am beginning to rely less on glaze to fill out my forms. My best work consists of objects that achieve a balance between clay form and glaze form. Here the form acts as a skeleton that holds up the muscle and skin of glaze. However, like in bodies, the framework often peeks



through in places; elbows, knuckles, toes. Seeing the structure *Glaze detail on 'Wednesday' Armchair*

¹ This statement could be misunderstood as if implying that form is synonymous with taste and can be learned; I think it more of an inherent sense that can be cultivated and tuned. My opinion of form is that it is akin to a complex language absolutely saturated with nuance. I do not know form well enough yet to speak deeply on this topic but felt it necessary to express how important it is to my work and myself.

of things that lie underneath, be it bones or porcelain, can reveal and accentuate the surfaces above. There is also an intriguing allure when glimpsing a small window of bone underneath layer upon layer of flowing, saturated goop.

The speed of building with clay is too slow for me. My favorite art is fast, like George Condo making a large drawing in twenty minutes. This art is not effortless but can be better described as natural; like having a bowel movement. Like a bodily function, my favorite art happens, you sit down, you do it, and it's done. I cannot build clay forms this way or I at least do not know how. Before I begin to make an object I dream about what it could be after the firing. I fall in love with the colors, textures, and depths and how a particular glaze interacts with a sloping edge, dissolving and devouring the form underneath in a viscous gravitational yearning. I can only picture the work in my mind glazed, never nude.

I build so that I can glaze, at least that is my current practice. Things are changing and I am



Karit - Porcelain and Glaze - 2019

starting to see the impact that a combination of strong form with great glaze can have. During graduate school however, I have focused mostly on glaze. When I glaze it is an action. This differs from when I build as all of the work is done before it comes time to glaze. The deep research, countless tests, and meticulous mixing have been tended to; the only thing left is action. I used to fantasize of a life where other artists brought bisqueware to me and allowed

me to run wild with glazes. Now I realize, this cannot be for I want to glaze a very particular kind of work, my own work. I need it to have my touch and be built by someone who was distracted-daydreaming of glaze:

Breeze floats in through the cracked window, fluffing up loose papers and bringing the scent of dusk to the studio. I sit, glazing a cup with goops of Demon Leather, my most saturated red glaze. I am contemplating the evolution of the tomato. On my

audiobook I learn that humans may have evolved color vision because of plants. A tomato turns red, the compliment of the surrounding green, in order to attract attention. AN obvious indication of ripeness to those strange creatures who can walk by. Consumption of a gift with an easy payback; poop out the seeds somewhere else.

Flowers scream in ultraviolet, insects cannot resist. The iris is surrounded with white to make it easier for fellow humans to see what you are looking at. The most vibrant bird-of-paradise gets all the ladies for surviving predation regardless of his bold plumage. I think on these things when I glaze my work. Indeed I glaze and color in a way that attracts and demands; marigold to bumblebee. Thick chartreuse rivers flow through pink mountains over the bumps of a sandy stoneware armature. Clouds of phase-separated iron pool in nebulae framed in ivory feldspar. Explosions of crimson weep into goosebumps of toothpaste green. I use color in my work to attract and seduce, however beneath this unctuous opulence lies whispers of decay. The following may explain why:

I hesitate to include the following, however, it has had a great impact on who I am and certainly affects my work. I struggle taking enough time to be accurate while I work. When I was eleven, I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. Due to a fluke likely caused by an over prescription of antibiotics combined with a hyperactive immune system, my body mistook the insulin producing beta cells in my pancreas for a virus and utterly decimated them. I no longer make any insulin and therefore must manually inject it in order to transport sugar from my bloodstream to the cells that use it as fuel. The problems with Diabetes arise in part because the pancreas is exceptional at delivering the exact amount of insulin needed to compensate for consumed food. Carbohydrates and insulin are not the only contenders in this process; stress levels, how much sleep you had, the toothpaste you use, even the humidity affects blood sugar levels. Having type 1 diabetes is a constant and never ending see-saw of consumption and regulation and if either end hits the ground, you die. During every minute that the levels are not perfectly balanced the too high or too low sugar levels slowly but permanently corrode every part of the body. This usually first destroys the fragile vessels within the eyeball and damages nerves in the feet so badly that walking becomes difficult and painful. This damage can lead to amputations, blindness, kidney, liver, and heart failure. Image how hard the heart has to work in order to pump syrup throughout the body.

No one knows when they are going to die, but the knowledge of what is likely to come in the next 30 years has caused me to develop work habits to try and make up for the time I will lose. My expected lifespan without diabetes would have been 77 years, now it is 57 years (cite?). That is a loss of 26%. This means that if I work 1.35 times faster I can accomplish what I would have without the disease.

Having this disease also confuses the way food appears. When I am hungry I desire food while simultaneously am anticipatorily repulsed by the nausea and pain that often follows eating. This is especially true for sweet confections, lush fruits, and colorful sugary treats. There is a draw and a toxicity to candy. However to eat a piece of candy is to partake not in a moment of necessity but one of indulgence and joy! This is exactly what I want my work to do. Perhaps there is a connection between my disease and the aesthetics of my work. The saturated colors and fantastic drips and goops may allude to the simultaneous allure and repulsion of sweetness. The grotesque aspects of my work (intestinal coils, sticky oozing goops) may also be a metaphor for the personal and complicated relationship I have with food. I am aware that I make objects that abstractly reference foods but are made of materials that are very unfriendly to teeth. Due to this quality, and the fact that I choose to make objects that place themselves within the everyday, it is possible that I am attempting to recreate my personal experience with consumption for those who cannot know what it is like to be Diabetic. To clarify, I am thinking specifically on the impossible desire that has been expressed by others to eat my ceramics.



Nick sitting in 'Wednesday' outside studio 170

As a diabetic, you develop intuition for certain systems of life that are normally buried and automatic. To instinctually know to the minute the time it takes for your stomach to break down a piece of bread, and to match that with the perfect amount of sluggishly responding synthetic insulin, is an extremely intimate experience. To intuit how heat, gravity, and form combine to dictate the flow of a drip of glaze is a very similar experience. Whether I am blood testing or glaze testing, I am deep in the minutia of the systems that I orbit. Yet

I use these tools to reach the larger world, to distort conventional understanding and shock others out of the mundanity of daily rituals and reveal the profundity and preciousness of every moment.

As you will see if you continue reading onto the bibliography of this thesis, I read a lot of science fiction, especially sci-fi shorts. Sci-fi has always captivated me due to its fearless contemplation of that which is and may be, as well as its incredible openness to what things might be like on other worlds. Sci-fi shorts often do not explain every detail of the narrative's story, instead you are thrust into environments totally incomprehensible often inhabited with creatures that you struggle to imagine. Almost every day I escape into these worlds where exploration is encouraged and curiosity is yanked.

Science fiction appears exotic and otherworldly on the surface but the heart of the stories are often about us here on Earth. Sci-fi provides a platform on which to ask questions at a distance. For example, the first televised interracial kiss was between Captain Kirk, a white human, and Lieutenant Uhura, a black alien.² This scene paved the way for future kisses between races of all sorts without the need for one of them to be an alien. In a larger sense sci-fi encourages the unrestricted exploration of all ideas, and in doing so cultivates discovery, curiosity, and wonder. I must briefly mention that during graduate school I invented an alter ego by the name of Gorglax who hails from Zeefromzeeglop, a terrestrial planet whose inhabitants are made of glass.

Zeefromzeeglop:

Gravity – 1.86 E

Atmospheric composition – Nitrogen, Oxygen, Methane, Carbon, Ammonia

Planet composition – Iron and Silicate core, silicate mantle and feldspathic crust.

Host star – B3 type class II blue supergiant

Average surface temperature – 637 C

Age - 5.2 billion years

Distance from Earth - Unknown

Intelligent life (Y/N) – Y

During my first year of study I became obsessed with trying to make a pot that I had never seen.

It is important to note that I was not interested in making a variation of an existing pot, but a

² Delmont, Matthew. "Fifty Years Ago, 'Star Trek' aired TV's First Interracial Kiss." Smithsonian Magazine

redefinition of what a pot is. Daydreaming about what an alien cup would look like captivated me. Are there other planets that produce clay from decomposed rock? How would the gravity or the needs and anatomy of the race affect form? What would firing in an atmosphere composed of copper vapor be like?

Questions such as these and the invention of Gorglax allowed me a setting in which to dive into these thoughts. I could close my eyes and imagine myself exploring such a world with 'trees' that bend down in arches against powerful gravity and silicate based life forms oozing along carbide sidewalks in cherry red heat. Creating entire alien environments and identities has allowed me to envision not only an alien cup, but the table that cup would go on, the house that would contain the table, and the planet that the house would be built upon. Gorglax provided a way for me to escape into a reality that was as completely alien to me as I could imagine, and create physical manifestations of objects that I experienced in my thought experiments.

I would be remiss if I neglected to include my important ceramic influences: Ken Price, Ron Nagle, Takuro Kuwata, Morten Lobner Esperson, Kathy Butterly and John Gill, to name a few. Each time I discovered these artist's work my gut clenched in ecstasy. They make objects that have a rich attraction while simultaneously having a captivating but inexplicable strangeness. Their work feels familiar enough that I recognize it and that it gets into me but is all the while absolutely otherworldly. Each of these artists make work that appears familiar (although explorative, open, and playful) through form and alien through material transformation.

I hesitate to compare my work to that of these artists because although many of them reference functional vessels, they do not make work that is intended to function (with the exception of John Gill and occasionally Takuro Kuwata). I seek the sophisticated exploration of form and otherworldly surfaces they achieve however I need my work to be a direct part of the lives of others. If I was the only human alive, I would probably still make ceramics, but I wouldn't make as much. I make work more for others than for myself.

Thank you to the artists above for showing me that boundaries exist only in the mind. Thank you to my advisors who have guided me so generously and patiently. Thank you to my parents and grandfather for your unwavering support and for teaching me what work is. Thank you to my fellow 7 graduates who have accepted and celebrated my quirks. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of my life, and thank you to those who will be a part, all of this is for you.

Technical Statement

In my mind clay and glaze are comprised of similar materials that lie on different points of the spectrum of melt. Although my palette contains several hundred glazes, the following are some of my favorite recipes and where they lie on said spectrum.

Least Melted-----Most melted

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

S.W.F.T. Porcelain ^10

Melt rating: 2

Minspar-23

Silica-25

Super Standard Porcelain-27

New Zealand Hallosite-25

Veegum-2

Super White Fairly Translucent porcelain is the most plastic clay body I have ever touched. It must be blunged as a thick slip and dried to a working consistency on plaster. Mixing this clay wet ensures total hydration of the ingredients. I personally believe that mixing clay wet and drying it out has a similar effect to aging clay. I chose Minspar as the feldspar even though it has excess sodium (which can cause porcelain to go rubbery overtime) for its exceptional whiteness. I have never had issues with rubbery clay. Drying the clay out on plaster may be the reason for this as the plaster sucks up the excess sodium (as evident from the half inch long sodium crystals that grow from my trough) either through capillary action or by a calcium-sodium ion exchange. The whiteness of this clay body is important as it allows for subtle coloration with stains in the clay or pale glazes on top of it.

Ice Clear ^10

Melt rating: 8-10

Spodumene-13

Wollastonite-20

Frit 3134-20

EPK-25

Silica-27

Zinc Oxide-8

This is the glaze I formulated to fit my porcelain perfectly, as in, the coefficient of thermal expansion of the glaze matches that of S.W.F.T porcelain to such an extent that it remains

transparent and craze free up to pools as deep as an inch. If fired once, Ice clear will retain air bubbles in deep pools. To resolve this I increased the Zinc up to 25% to achieve a Bristol reaction to decrease viscosity which allows for air bubbles to be released. Firing multiple times can also release air bubbles.

Stull 6 ^10

Melt rating: 5

Minspar-31.3

Whiting-13

Grolleg-18

Silica-41

Veegum-2

This glaze is based on the composition of a ^6 cone derived from Hermann Seger's cone formulation research. It is extremely viscous and responds excellently to oxides and stains. I mix this most often with 50% water to get a mixture like warm cream cheese. As with most of my glazes I mix batches of white, black, red, yellow, and blue and mix those to achieve any color.

Gum ^10

Melt rating: 3.5

Minspar-70.7

Grolleg-9.6

Silica-17.6

Veegum-2

Gum is a stiffer version of Stull 6 that can retain some of the texture that was imparted to it when it was applied. In special cases when heat, gravity, and form are just right, gum can pull apart upon melting and reveal its sticky interior structure with tendrils of thin glassy fingers. This glaze is so viscous that it can be applied several inches thick.

Toothpaste ^04

Melt rating: 4?

Frit 3110-46.5

Gerstly Borate-12.5

EPK-3.5

Silica-37.5

Toothpaste is a recent discovery. It is a gorgeous foam that expands and heals over, showing large air bubbles but remaining both strong and not sharp. This glaze foams likely due to the high flux ratio and firing temperature. The skin of this glaze melts and seals before the gas inside has a chance to be released thus trapping it and creating a foam. At the end of the firing the silica begins to dissolve into the matrix contributing to its amazing strength. Try it with copper

carbonate for extremely vibrant sodium blues that make even the most saturated Egyptian paste blush with envy.

Glazing Playlist:

The following songs are those that I most often listened to while mixing glaze and glazing my work. Of these, Journey to the End is the most important. Written and performed by Valfar three years before dying of hypothermia at age 25. The lyrics convey a message that resonates with my personal motivations and drives what I am trying to accomplish with my work.

“A vague shadow lurking in the dark,
A sane man’s worst nightmare,
A vision containing death
As a wake in honor of himself.

For equal sane mortals
It’s a nightmare becoming real.
But I, I see it as the final clause of a never-ending deal.”

-Valfar (Terje Bakken)

Due to my disease, I am constantly reminded of my approaching death. Living with this reminder has encouraged me to experience life as fully as I can before the bell tolls for me. Perhaps in making my work I am negotiating this situation with myself while creating objects that embolden their users to pay closer attention and appreciate the moments that are often disregarded as mundane. The following songs, most of which fall under the genre of black metal, frequently grapple with the transient nature of life and encourage their listeners to live fully as a means of facing the inevitability of their demise.

Journey to the End-Windir
Obygdens pionjar-Vintersorg
Songen Åt Fangen-Vried
Ei Fane Svart-Cor Scorpïi
Dauden-Windir
Skleur Dallus-Vindland
Shape Shifter-Amon Amarth
Runes to my Memory-Amon Amarth
Bagpipes of War-Skiltron

Ategnatos-Eluveite
Svartsyn-Mistur
Profetens Åpenbaring-Gorgoroth
Matriarch’s Lament-Mistur
...Of Forests Unknown...-Falkenbach
Wulfarweijd-Falkenbach
The Path-Wolfchant
Spleen Black Metal-Nocturnal Depression
Winter Madness-Wintersun

Mot Helgrind-Thyrfinng
Boudica-Aeternus
The Profound Power-Windir
Hel Hath No Fury-Tyr
Stikke Wound-Falkenbach
Bluot Fuer Blout-Falkenbach
Beer, Metal, Trolls and Vomit!-Nordheim
Jotunheimsfaerden-Svartsot
Morte Lumina-Metalocalypse
Ufirstanan Folk-Falkenbach
Free Will Sacrifice-Amon Amarth
Harvest-Naglfar
Arntor ein Windir-Windir
Forged in fire-Manegarm
The Spiritlord-Windir
Tuli Kokko-Korpiklaani
Likbor-WEH
Fagning-Windir
Loneliness (Winter)-Wintersun
Ending-Windir
Radix malorum-Gorgoroth
On the Mountain of Goats-Windir
Blodssvik-Windir
Blazing Star-Dethklok
Todeswalzer-Windir
Matyrium-Windir
Saknet-Windir
Wind the Horn-Ego Fall
...The Ardent Awaited Land-Falkenbach

Zakliatie-Arkona
Nifelheim-Wulfgar
The Three Norns-Wulfgar
Awaken- Metalocalypse
Land of Snow and Sorrow-Winterson
Blodorn-Manegarm
Beyond The Dark Sun-Wintersun
A Night At The Schwarzer Kater-Ye
Banished Privateers
Mettanpeiton Valtiaalle-Korpiklaani
Kvaoning-Alestorm
Dressed as Goblins-Nekrogoblikon
Cruzat Beer House Song-Tersivel
Narfi-Skalmold
Liisint-Trollfest
Varden Brenne-Einherjer
Death Throes of the Terrorsquid-Alestorm
King of Storms-Ensiferum
Sahti-Korpiklaani
Mina Nain Vedessa Neidon-Korpiklaani
Raise Your Horns-Amon Amarth
Twilight Of The Thunder God-Amon
Amarth
Accursed-Tengger Cavalry
Uis Elveti-Eluveitie
War Horse-Tengger Cavalry
Wanderer-Ensiferum
Hoplnir-Troll Bends Fir

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On Longing – Susan Stewart
The Miraculous Adventures of Rumo – Walter Moers
The Monkey House – Kurt Vonnegut
Sirens of Titan – Kurt Vonnegut
The Art Instinct – Denis Dutton
12 Rules for Life – Jordan Peterson
Infinite – Jeremy Robinson
Soonish – Kelly and Zach Weinersmith
Astrophysics for People in a Hurry – Neil deGrasse Tyson
Semiosis – Sue Burke
Cosmos – Carl Sagan
Artemis – Andy Weir
For We Are Many – Dennis E. Taylor
All These Worlds – Dennis E. Taylor