

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

The Place That Is

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CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| HOW DOES WORK HAPPEN? | 2 |
| THE STUDIO | 3 |
| AN OBJECT: THE CONE | 4 |
| PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE | 5 |
| SPACE / PLACE | 7 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 10 |
| TECHNICAL STATEMENT | 11 |

(Enter at center.)

(On hands and knees.)

(Move down.)

(Move down.)

Ruler to tics. Knees to ruler.

(Press and pull.)

(Pause.)

(Stand up. Move over. Crouch down.)

Glue in hair. Shoes off.

Glue it. Stick it. Lay it flat.

(Pause.)

(Move over.)

16 pilot holes.

16 dry wall screws.

SAND SAND SAND SAND SAND SAND SAND SAND SAND SAND

THE STUDIO

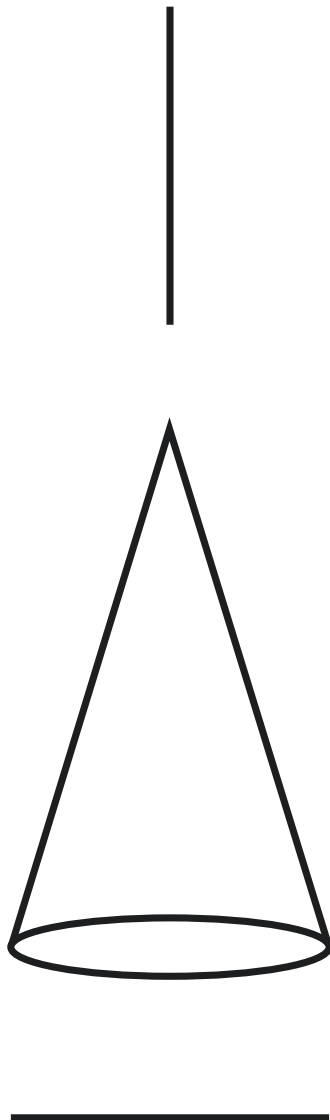
The studio is a place for working. Working with material, motivated by questions and the rarity of answers. I feel strongly that my sculptures are unconditionally tied to the studio. It is where material is labored over and articulated with clarity. Material is cast, sewn, sheathed, cut, poured, glued, sanded and painted. Corners are sharpened and threads are trimmed.

The studio is where pacing, editing, and intense looking happens. For me, the acts of making sculpture are rooted in the desire to problem solve. The desire to create order between color, image, form and scale. The fluid air of the studio is where photography and sculpture overlap, where clay is blanketed in pattern, and rope is braided.

These material processes are important to the sculptures presence and aesthetic. Process and technique are why material looks smooth, or blue, or shiny. All of these attributes make up how an object projects itself. Just as a body, the sculpture is dressed and showing its facade.

AN OBJECT: THE CONE

My desire to understand form is primary. I look toward the geometric visual language of the cube, cylinder and cone to achieve an in-depth relationship with form. I have adopted the reoccurring use of the cone as a basis and icon for much of my work. I look at the cone with an idealist eye. I see this shape as transitional. Beginning from a circular, flat base, it pulls upward and smoothly narrows to a assertive, pointed tip. Its visual nature is simultaneously grounded and climbing. The cone is optimal. It is full, whole and present.



PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE

Partial facsimiles and pattern occur in my work through digital photography. The camera is a tool for duplication, alteration and expansive scale. The camera allows me to capture still objects that serve as image for paper decoupage, printed vinyl and painting. In all these instances, I make small prop objects in my studio with the sole function of having their picture taken. Using a gradient back drop, I stage, light, and photograph the props. These miniatures stay in a state of model within the shelves of my studio. When I photograph a studio made prop, a cycle of representation and abstraction begins. A direct example of this within the work is the doubling of the cone. A white, 12" plaster cone is placed on a gradient backdrop and photographed. This digital file is blown up to 6 ft wide x 10 ft height and printed on a vinyl banner and installed within the sculpture. Included in the same sculpture, is a 4 ft plaster cone that resembles the miniature in the photograph. This doubling of the white cone, one in real space and one in re-produced image, questions the relationship between facsimile and the original and how they differ from one another.

The relationship between sculpture and photography has a long historical lineage. The progression from three dimensional object, to digital camera, to computer, to print allows me to pull and push the qualities of an object. Is a photograph of a sculpture an archival document, a representational image, or something different entirely? Selected text from *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, by Walter Benjamin suggests that the original art

work, when reproduced in a photograph “can bring out aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens” and that “technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself”¹. I use this theory quite literally in my work in terms of reach and attainability. Using a camera I can propel a 12”, plaster cone, into a 25 ft vinyl banner hung from the ceiling. Photographing an object and printing an image of it pushes that object into a new weight, scale and material. Scale is so easily confused in a photographic reproduction. Solid, heavy, objects are flattened and can appear weightless. Art theorist, Andre Malraux, points out that the photograph “acquire(s) significance through the denial, or at least the alteration of relative scale. So that the beholders’ sensations of distance, be they physical or temporal, recede(s) perceptually”². The flattening of a dimensional object dissolves space around it, depth falls away. When I take an image of the cone, it is no longer plaster, it does not have a circumference of 5 inches, it cannot make a shadow. All of the attributes of the original are re-invented by vinyl and ink. Ink imitates plaster, ink suggests circumference. Now, vinyl material casts a shadow and has weight. By including direct object experience and pictorial representation, side by side, I am truly trying to understand how form and material create space.

¹ Benjamin, Walter. “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction”, *Visual Culture: Experiences in Visual Culture* (2011): 116.

² Bergstein, Mary. “On the Documentary Photography of Sculpture”, *The Art Bulletin* 74, no. 3 (1992): 476

SPACE / PLACE

“A liminal space is a state between...It is a transitional space, neither practical nor constructive...Like the space of a doorway between rooms, it lacks concrete definition because even though it conveys something from its previous stage, it has not yet become the new one.”

- Ann Bogart ³

My work hovers within the liminal. The installation in the Turner Gallery merges the space of the stage and the place of a designed interior that together invent an unnamed, yet recognizable experience.

Posing a group of objects builds a physical and metaphorical space that I am calling a stage. This space serves as grounds for experiencing the performative presence of a sculptural object. My work takes on the role of set, prop and actor, simultaneously defining and filling space of the stage. It is within this *space* that *place* is invented.

Wooden panels, curtains of vinyl and armatures of steel are organized in a staggered line. Objects are placed in the middle of the room, not tethered to the

³ Bogart, Anne. And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World. New York, NY: Routledge (2007): 72.

wall. The structures are large and often hover over my head. I arrange and pose components, as if to purely please. My work is presented with the attention to detail expected from a surreal hotel lobby. This interior place is for occupants to navigate *within* architecture, *among* objects. It is a place that one moves through where everything appears without effort. In the surreal hotel lobby the familiarity of home makes us comfortable but in the margins is the unfamiliar. The strangeness is where imagination and play are called. Things are *like* stairs, *like* a table, *like* a window, however they are invented. Invented with the essence of the recognizable.

Building off the archetype of the interior place, I consider the circumstance I put the work in. Spatial organization in my sculpture is both vertical and horizontal. Structural components sit in a rhythm of tall and short, opaque and transparent. Curated elements of lighting, texture, and color join to build intimacy, and construct mood. This articulated place is motionless. Still geometric shapes sit on the floor or on top of each other. Objects hang from this and lean on that.

I see these noted elements of the work to be based on conditions. What is a condition? Is it tall *because* it sits on top of something else? Does it look weightless *because* it is white? Is it smooth *because* it was sanded?

The act of looking at a sculpture reveals these conditions. One can stand at a distance and take in the entirety or peer, closely, eyes inches from the surface.

Looking prompts crouching, leaning in or looking behind. Through observation, process and material are made visible. How an object is made, how it is staged, and how it is viewed combines to reveal how it performs in the world.

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TECHNICAL STATEMENT

OBJECT:

Potter plaster #1
Plaster gauze
Hydrocal
Melamine
Finished plywood
Medium density fiberboard
DOW Styrofoam
Colored clay aggregate
Terra cotta clay
Steel
2 x 4 lumber
Cotton
Plexi-glass

SURFACE:

Joint Compound
Laser printed copy paper
Elmer's glue and water mixed 1:1
Latex paint (Eggshell and Semi-matte)
Krylon Krystal Clear - gloss
High gloss enamel
Ceramic glaze

ONLINE MATERIALS RESOURCES:

EStreetPlastics.com - colored acrylic sheets (2' X4')

Signs4X.com - large vinyl banners

BannersOnTheCheap.com - large vinyl banners

KentSupplies.com - diamond hand sanding pads

GranQuartz.com - diamond pneumatic sanding discs

CERAMIC PROCESS:

Porcelain Colored Aggregate

| <u>Material</u> | <u>Pounds</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| Grolleg | 30 |
| XX Sagger | 30 |
| Tile 6 | 10 |
| Minspar | 20 |
| Flint | 15 |
| Bentonite | 2 |
| Frit 3124 | 5 |
| color with mason stains | |

Process:

Mix 25 pound dry batches for each color aggregate desired. To dry batch add 15- 20% Mason Stain, dry sieve, add water and whip into thick slip to disperse all color evenly.

Pour out colored slip onto plaster slab, flipping once. Once slip is bone dry, break into small chunks (no bigger than nickel size). Fire in a bisque crucible to Cone 2.

Once fired, use the Jaw Crusher in Grinding room to achieve desired grit. Once desired grit is reached, rinse your aggregate to remove dust accumulated from crushing.

Application:

Prepare wet Jr. Tile Red into 5 pound chunks. For dense distribution of colored grog throughout clay body, wedge in 1 pound of aggregate per 5 pounds of clay.

Bisque fire your object to Cone 015 - 01 (lower the bisque, the easier hand sanding will be)



Example of cobalt, manganese and iron oxide aggregate

Colored In-Lay Clay

Recipe: Lydia Johnson, Ceramic MFA 2016

| <u>Material</u> | <u>Pounds</u> |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Grolleg | 8 |
| EPK | 17 |
| OM4 | 25 |
| Minspar | 10 |
| Frit 3124 | 23 |
| Silica | 17 |

Application: This clay is mixed to a slurry, divided and mason stain color is added. Made into a plastic clay and pressed into carved pattern. Then, bisque fired to 012 to allow for easy wet sanding. It has good fit with minimal cracking when in-laid into Jr. Tile Red. Final fire to Cone 1 oxidation.



Example of colored clay with black in-lay clay and aggregate