

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE PERFORMANCE OF OBJECTS

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2011

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This thesis is about the nature of objects and the interaction of bodies with their extensions and remnants. The residual evidence contained within an object, of and from interactions with living things, is an inanimate performance the suggestions of activity within stillness. As part of the hunt for gestures and moments, all things that I bring into the studio are simultaneously objectified and translated into narratives. In turn these transformative processes embody both a non-fiction of their history and origin, and the fiction of assemblage. Words are at the root of my sculptural works, the physical materials are sought through the necessities of the articulation of thoughts. The found objects are in one way or another facts, and the combinations, compositions and manipulations become a fiction. The performance of objects, the tolerances of materials and bodies, generates a story that is the content of this work.

# The Performance of Objects

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
2011

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank all of the professors, friends, and family who have both made this work possible and influenced its development.

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## Chapter 1: Looking and Finding



Figure 1

To begin working on a piece I put myself into a seeking mode. This process coincides with my ordinary activities, walking in the woods, driving to get somewhere, and shopping at flea markets and junk shops. Technically the only requirements are patience and awareness. Often I'll try to gather a certain quantity of one type of thing, to find the variations within a category. Hunting for me is an interactive event, sometimes it is a game, and it can also be a somber task. Once I have captured the objects, processing them is a bit like separating the guts from the animal, finding just what I wanted from this thing in the first place, meat, skin, bones, maybe just the guts. All of the awareness of searching is tuned to the essence of these objects.



Figure 2

Through observation of nature things unfold and details become apparent. This act of tracking and observing traces inevitably results in discovering the unexpected. All of the things I find or chose to call found, curated from the other objects and surroundings, have some relation to living bodies, a bone or animal part, an accessory to some activity. Out of the wild world of reality, where everything is natural, all objects have some form of life and death. Wildness is the gravity of natural energy. Wildness is the condition that all cultures strive to harness and contain, to economize this source of energy. When this force in some way breaks the boundaries of societal trappings, the greatest political and social forces are left powerless. I seek to explore the tensions between the wild and the manufactured. This relationship can exist within an object and indicate the broad tendencies of the natural world. The chance occurrence of a found object is indicative of the circumstance of experiencing art in the broadest sense. The experience of finding or discovering on a visual and emotional level is the closest objects can come to being profound and



authentic. This authenticity is what I strive to reproduce in sculptural works.



Figure 3

## Chapter 2: Properties of Bodies



Figure 4

Our living bodies exist in the capacity of the present, we burn the energies of existence. The idea of the animal world, its economies and behavior systems, is indicative of basic and complex human actions. I constantly rely on thoughts about animals as a side story or a reference to the wild potentials of the world. The significance of an animal, say an owl in the woods, is a sentient reminder of the powerful forces of nature. Animal life can become poetic extensions and exaggerations on the limited capacity of the human body. I am drawn to the natural behavior of objects, the remnants of bodies. To see a rock that is 6 billion years old has a tremendous amount of visible although incomprehensible age, to see a fossilized whale's ear that is 1,000,000 years old has something very different. A narrative becomes clear with the connection to a living thing, even though the objects themselves are fairly similar. Bodies that are on a scale of time that precedes us speak to the evolution of flesh and its

connection to the earth. The fragmented quality of body remnants can heighten the potential stories that these objects contain. A disembodied part is evidence of the once whole.

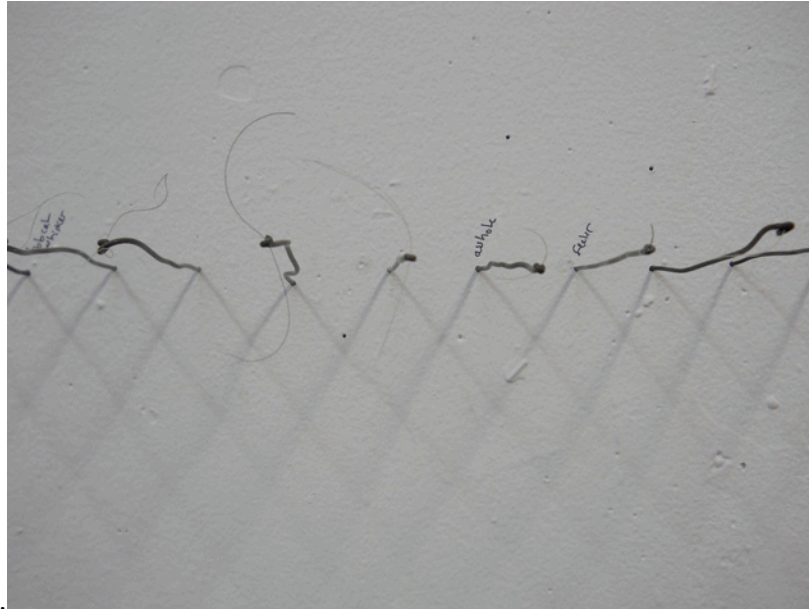


Figure 5

The function of bodily remnants is to provide a connection back to the whole through the essences of identity. I have focused on parts that have meaningful associations, but the significance of those associations changes throughout the making process. For example the idea of a single hair as the most basic visible evidence is in one way the essence of a being and in another way something that once shed takes a fair amount of expertise to identify within scientific standards. Through the process of collecting hairs, and specifically seeking diversity among hair sources, I found that the disembodied hair carried information that could be modified. Within the realm of humans there is a lot of diversity of hair/line qualities from various body parts, genders and ethnicities. Through the naming process I

could play with the origin or the identity of the line of a single hair. The transformation of an anonymous hair into a line of wonderful nose, colonel's eyebrow, fox's whisker, bear's back etc. is the basis of a narrative that develops through the piece. As a false collection the piece speaks to the futility of scientific systems of identification, at the same time each hair becomes a drawing on the blankness of the wall that is positioned with intimate importance.



Figure 6

The objects that bodies are when dead and shed while they are alive contain residual life and energy that can be much more powerful than other static things. The history of sculpture is a history of stillness, both the capturing of still life, and the brinks and subtleties of motions and forces. To look broadly at the history of representational and figurative sculpture, gesture and the invocation of motion within stillness, and stasis through longevity have been parameters. My works that use body parts, castings and representations of body parts, and body extensions fit into this history of stillness. There is perhaps nothing new in this approach but maybe a different translation of very old stories and ideas.

## Chapter 3: Humor and Jokes

I want meaning and experience to be pure and powerful. To search the world looking for profound experiences is something that is essential to all people in one way or another. Whether through religious irreverence or the most simplified communications this depth has many forms. One form of emotional experience that always needs space and time is humor. Sadness and other experiential forms have important roles, but humor is my favorite indulgence. A big part of humorous events and objects is the subtlety of announcing that something is in fact a joke. Humor is of course subjective but the delivery can be enough to situate a tone of intention that may be hard to locate. Jokes are an important crop to be grown, especially within the context of art, a joke is a subversive way of talking about the more serious subjects in the world.



Figure 7

The term joke best describes the different types of humor I have been experimenting with. A joke is temporary by nature and is less structured

than other comedies. The open format of jokes allows for just about anything to be called as such, and take on the characteristics of a humorous gesture. In terms of amusement and laughter, I find the terminology of funny to encapsulates ideas of awkwardness or even shame. All the same humor has an inexplicable response, sometimes there are elements of clarity and sometimes there is just nonsense.



Figure 8

Anything can be made into a joke. Art is a naturally exclusive field, by allowing humor to be the profound medium of a piece without necessarily lightening the subject of the work, some degree of exclusivity is lost. My goal is to complete a thought, this does not require significance or even response, but to look at things I am working on and not feel the pretentious pressures of fine art would be a great result. Jokes are not always easy to understand, but can exist between other forms of communication.

## Chapter 4: Sounds of Words



Figure 9

I rely on the literal in three ways, the use of narrative subject/imagery, the connotative power of material, and the use of text. In combination the objects I have been working with seem to take aural qualities, the sound of the subject, the sound of the material, and the sounds of the words involved. When I have some words I can roll them over each other in my head and begin looking through what I have already and for new things and materials

The process becomes an effort to match the thought with a physical result, and the mixing of the sounds of words with the articulation of objects. Before I begin a project I need to find words or a phrase, from which I can base the material work of the sculpture. The words I begin with are not always what I end up with, but the development of the phrase occurs simultaneously with the assemblage of objects. For instance, the phrase “it seemed like a good idea at the time” has taken several forms in the pieces involving safes, brains and frogs. That phrase has very little

poetic merit in itself, but in the context of the objects the different variations phrases in a handwriting font becomes referential to the thinking process. The original idea comes from the phrase “thoughts about thinking” that again is plain but carries an idea which ties the objects together.



Figure 10

When it comes to the form of the text, I am drawn to handwriting. The bent wire that supports the leaping frogs has the fluidity of a penned line and becomes the path of the jump. The font of the text in this piece is nostalgic and playful, to heighten the distance between the thought and its originator. The wire is also simply a functional line, that can be drawn and supports itself.





Figure 11

With some pieces I have used a metal stamping technique that produces a typewritten font one letter at a time. Each letter is hammered into the material and the inconsistencies produce a hand and drawn effect that relies on spacing and alignment to relate the font to the feeling of the word. The use of metal in these works is in direct contrast to the fleeting qualities of the text.

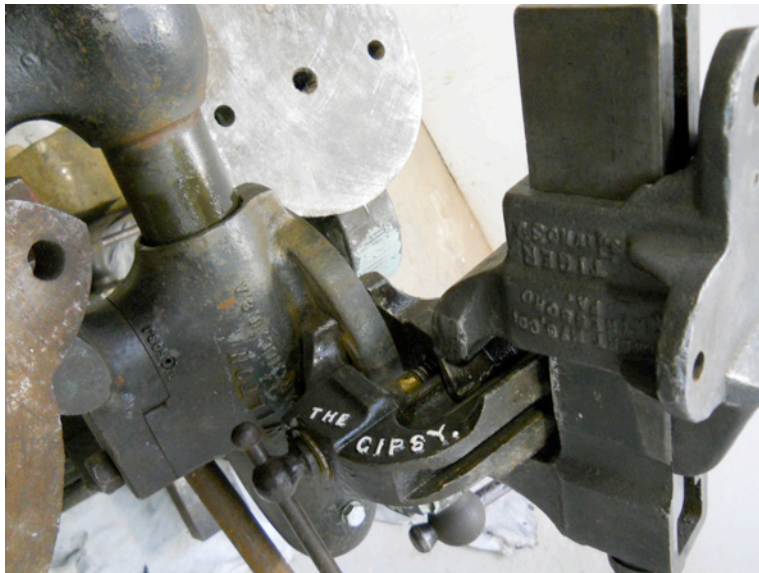


Figure 12

In my most recent works found text has become very important. On all of the objects involved, safes, vises and horns, manufacturing names and

branded titles give both an age and a character to the objects. Especially in “Versus” the maker’s name, often the name of a person who owned the company, adorns each vise in various degrees of pride. In terms of anthropomorphic objects, this naming and identity was the impetus of the piece, I was attempting to contribute to the pool of thought that developed the diversity of this type of device. The process of collecting and researching the multitude of designs and manufacturers resulted in a lot of vises that are currently biting one another in a tumultuous fight. The structure of this cluster is dependent upon the clamping power of each vise to resist and support its own weight. As the accumulation grows the structure becomes more tenuous and the fragility of these somewhat mighty beasts is threatened. The names like Charles Parker, Reed, Starrett, Emmert and their cryptic product titles are subtle lines of identity within this battle.



Figure 13

## Chapter 5: Provisional Legacy



Figure 14

All of the found objects I am using are part of legacies of people and living things that have changed form. Legacy is a fundamental function of art, whether for the legacy of the present, popularity, or the legacy of the past or future, historical significance. This is why I have been drawn to metal as a material. The lasting qualities of metals, resistance and capacitance, lend themselves to the various conceptual translations I need. Provisional is the best way to describe the making process I employ. Although I often engage in the formal craft processes casting, and metal fabrication, these procedures are coincidental with the more ephemeral tasks of searching for objects. I like the experience of finding things and working with the anonymity of an object that has been abandoned. I do not have any specific audience in mind nor do I have a particular place, but I like to think that I make adjustments to the work to accommodate or provoke either aspect of context. The purity and authority of certain

natural objects cannot be duplicated. I want to exhibit this authenticity as acknowledgement of the legacy of how materialized ideas deteriorate. Humor and absurdity have been ways of contextualizing and tempering some of the more serious minded ideals I have tried to create.

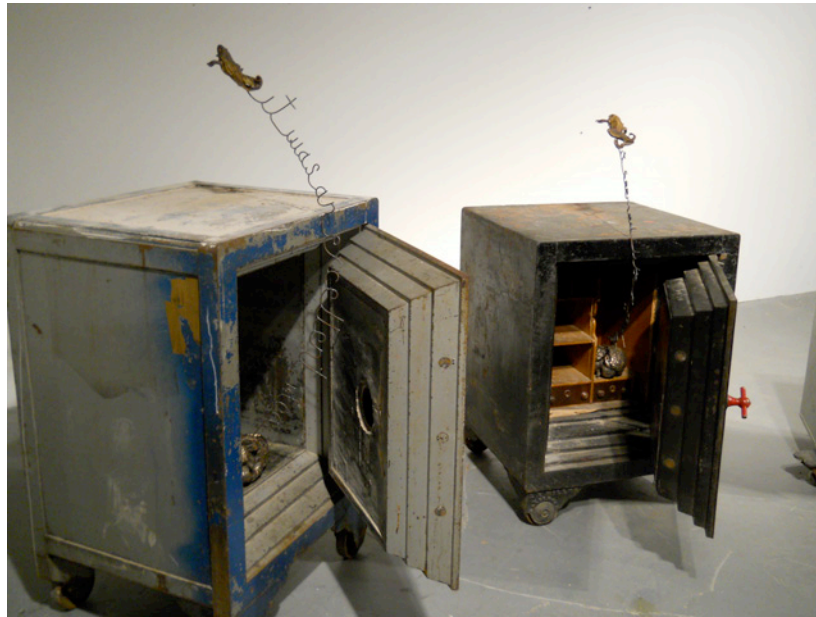


Figure 15

The nature of my artworks shift often, ~~the~~ things are different from one day to the next. They are dependent on the contradictions of attempting to be one thing and actually being another. Most of my works could be displayed in any number of locations and embody quite different sets of significance. These gestures are aimed at a sequence of ideas, and often rely heavily on the nature of surroundings. I am not very interested in traditional spaces for art, but more interested in the adaptability of art objects in different locations, (the dump, the woods, the back of the pick-up truck) the act of assembling and dissolving. I'd like things I have worked with to be discovered in similar circumstances to the various ways

that I have found them, disconnected from myself as an artist, but connected to the remainder of an idea or story inherent to the objects.



Figure 16

A lot of the content of the work is about things like age, death and legacy, which are subjects I have a very hypothetical understanding of. Weight and gravity are very important to the objects I work with. Even the lightest hairs are suspended to show the ability of their girth to support itself. I like to walk around the world carefully, and observe as much as possible, I find it easy to focus deeply on identifying things and objects. Sometimes this identification is the content of the piece. To touch back on a more serious (but still sometimes funny) subject, the idea of death and the thought of bodies decomposing and turning back into dirt has been a constant source of hypothetical and narrative fascination. Dirt and dust is a substance that is the combination of many substances, on a scale that becomes an indistinguishable field. Like the layered atmospheric sounds that fill the air, this substance settles on and around everything. Many of



the things I work with must be unburied from the dirt, and produce various types of dust and dirt as they are handled. Like an animal shedding a hair this material is important to the nature of the object in question. The precise timing that allows one thing to be found from its origins as dirt and its destination to dirt is the scale on which these sculptural works are created. As objects deteriorate and become dirt themselves, the fragments of stories unfold and are reburied.



Figure 17

The latest piece that I have been working on has been a sculpted crocodile form called “Underground”. The origin of the idea came from two sources. The first was the image of a buried tuba, surrounded by dirt, slowly being exposed by some force, water or possibly vibration. The second aspect of the idea came from burying my dog over the winter. He was old and his health had been deteriorating for months. His breathing was very labored for the last few weeks of his life, and I would sit with him at night and when the spaces between his breaths would become so

long that he would stop breathing all together. Hearing his breaths and all the complex sounds of activity in his abdomen, and when weeks later the heaving symphony finally ended I felt more grief than I could ever explain. It wasn't just my memories of his life, but more the suspended breath within this creature who was so vibrant and powerful in his own way. Burying him in the morning, pushing the shovel through the frozen ground and finding the still wet layers of red clay, the sounds of the digging were swallowed as the hole got deeper.

The piece "Underground" is in many ways about sound and breath, the sound of the dirt, the holding or the lack of breath entirely. The reason for the crocodile is that the animal comes out of nowhere to consume. Its frightful power is not that of the skilled hunter who tracks its prey, but that of cunning patience. In the end the crocodile will get us all, despite our best efforts. The sculpture illustrates this beast cut in half in the style of a magician's act appearing to be popped apart. The brass instruments burst from the bowls of the dirt shape, with all of their breath emptied, soundless. In one way I see this piece as something like the band is dead, that monster ate the fun, the vigor of life is gone. In another way it is the death of a death (symbolic) or the examination of death's death. Despite the intensity of my inspirational experiences, I think that this work has elements of a joke. There are certainly morbid facets to the ideas and the images, but the nature of the execution of the idea is a of cartoon landscape, popped in half like an unplugged electrical chord.



Figure 18

The provisional quality of objects and the legacy of their performances is a field through which to view the closeness of history. Stillness and its states are evermore ignored in favor of the pace of technological efficiency. The sculptures I have been working on are testaments to physical slowness and the speed of the earth. In finding these works I hope they are both humorous and also poignant and honest.