

Abstract

Title of thesis: Truth in the Experience

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This document focuses on the development of my artwork during my three year studio practice at the University of Maryland, College Park. It discusses the evolution of the various types of work and how they function artistically and conceptually. It culminates in an explanation of my work in the thesis exhibition, with which I have discovered the importance of the experience of an artwork as a crucial functional element of the work.

Truth in the Experience

By

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I would like to thank Monica for all of your patience and support.
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Figure 1

Chapter 1: Prologue

“It works!” I exclaimed with feverish excitement at the first signs of life within the creation. The experimentation and failures over the past several years have now come together to form the grand machine. But how, one must ask, and what is the inspiration? What is there to learn, to gain? All the snippets of stamped out thoughts, botched trials in the forced evolution of inanimate objects, self experimentation, folly with artillery - what have they led to? It is a way of understanding that I, the artist, am in love with machines. Throughout the process of trial and error, a simplified essence of experience was emerging from the chaos. Complexity - physical, visual, and psychological - developed out of one of the most simple and basic of machine components: the chain. I am inspired by the loop of the hand chain, used so many times to transmit human power into the hoist when moving large or heavy objects.

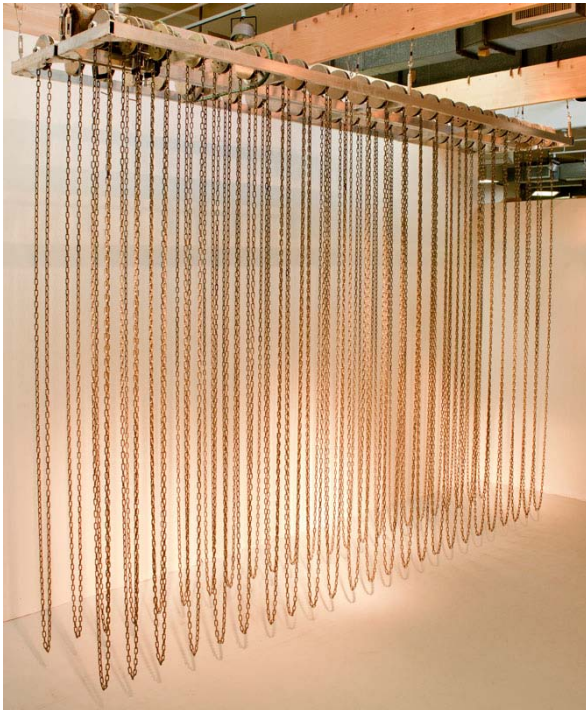


Figure 2



Figure 3

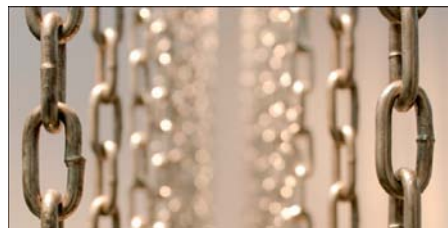


Figure 4

Most times, the work took an enormous amount of planning, fabrication, and resources. This most recent piece still does, but what happened after its final assembly was startling. It was the emergence of unplanned events, of unforeseen phenomena that began to interest me now. Would it be possible to harness what was happening? Even in stillness, while the piece is at rest, there is motion. There is a fascination with movement and the viewer's perception of that movement and the other phenomena that reside within it.

Chapter 2: TEXT & DESTRUCTION

I briefly worked with text-based artwork in the past. Looking back, it seems they were a bit too esoteric in their messages. They used variations in punctuation and capitalization to create new interpretations and meanings while

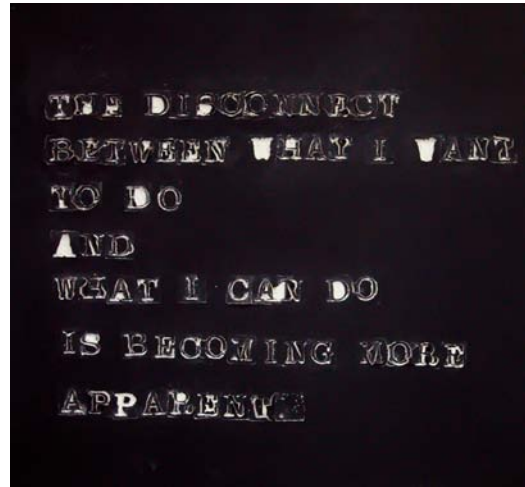


Figure 5

still using the same words. The new text

based pieces are intentionally designed to be accessible to people both inside and outside the art world at a multitude of levels. The piece “THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN WHAT I WANT TO DO AND WHAT I CAN DO IS BECOMING MORE APPARENT” is one such work.

The words themselves are not the only message. The use of all capital letters



Figure 6

alludes to “shouting” in emails, Instant Messaging, text messaging and other new media messaging systems. The method of smashing a message to the drywall using a sledgehammer and cast metal letters relates to the power and destructive force of words. When each letter is struck in order to spell out a specific phrase or message, the legible qualities of the work erodes. The surface is essentially destroyed as the message attempts to make itself heard.



Figure 7

Some of my works play off of the destruction of architecture and the tools and methods employed in the actual demolition process. I have created a hollow cast iron wrecking ball, which is typically symbolic of a destructive force. However, it is also symbolic of transformation and renewal. In one adaptation, a wrecking ball was dropped onto a handmade pedestal effectively destroying the base that the sculpture would have rested on. In the barest interpretation of the work, this piece gives the viewer a sense of the potential harm that could come of them if they were under the weight of the wrecking ball. In a theatrical/performative sense, the act of placing the wrecking ball and destroying the pedestal – or wall, or floor - is as symbolically important as the mass of the object and its destructive potential.

Chapter 3: EVOLUTION

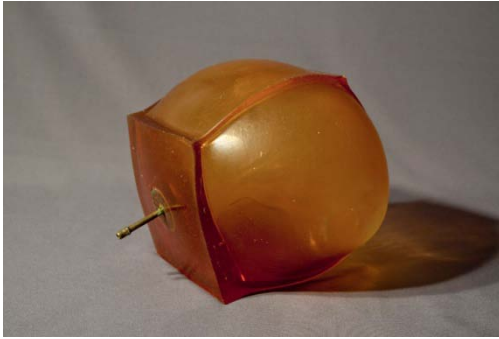


Figure 8



Figure 9

I abhor inflation and inflatable art. As a solution to my intense dislike of inflatable art I decided to inflate my own head. Well, not literally my own head, but a sculpture of it. Casting an image of myself though seemed to be too much about ego, vanity, and the self, so it was decided to simplify the object to be inflated. I chose the most basic of shapes: the CUBE. This form was chosen because it is one of the basic building blocks of art



Figure 10

throughout history. Cubes are one of the first objects a student draws to learn about form and value. My intention with this inflatable work is to create completely new forms that will resemble their original shape, but are larger and have less detail and more variations due to the varying thickness of the rubber.

In order to make this project manifest, I needed to create a machine that would allow the objects to be cast hollow so that they may be inflated with air or some other substance. The resulting machine worked, and the resulting cast forms were as expected: unpredictable. There were many failures, just the same as

seen in natural evolution: *survival of the fittest*. Many of the castings were uninflatable failures, but in that regard they were a part of the evolutionary process, an attempt at something that allowed others to flourish. An off shoot of this project is to make molds of the inflated forms, cast those in rubber and again inflate. This multi-generational approach is based on the concept of the deterioration and degradation of copies. This is apparent in everyday life, just the same as in what happens with paper photocopies, or the corruption of digitized files when they are copied, transferred, emailed, reopened, burned to disk, etc.

Chapter 4: KABOOM!



Figure 11

“Go Ahead, Make My Day” is a work based on two revolutionary war cannons which are mounted on a wooden carriage. Unlike their historic counterparts, the cannons are both affixed to the same carriage and pointed directly at one another at point blank range. The piece started off as two separate cannons, each with its own carriage. After much consideration it was decided to merge the two cannons together on one carriage. It is a commentary on the absurdity of destructive elements and the infinitely small bits of time that can decide the winner or loser of a conflict. It illustrates an internal conflict, something we are locked into and cannot avoid. It also represents the battle that is always going on inside my own mind. In a global sense, the piece functions much like a civil war - both sides believe their ideals should prevail over the opposition.

Being bench sized, it also invites the viewer to sit down between the two cannons, which are now pointed directly at their body.

If this piece is ever fired, the victor will be determined by just a fraction of a second. The muzzles of the cannons are only 2.5 feet apart. Even just two thousandths of a second could decide the fate of the losing side. I see two possible outcomes with the firing of this piece. The first of which is a stalemate. If the cannons fire within one or two milliseconds of one another, the cannon balls may strike one another and fall away. If they fire out of sync beyond that small amount of time, one cannon ball may shoot down the barrel of the other cannon, thus causing an obstruction in the barrel, a rupture, and finally the end of the conflict.

Chapter 5: THE SELF

“Pencil Beard” began as an attempt at adding a new category to the *Guinness Book of World Records*. In the tradition of Guinness, I have made a set of rules that I must abide by whenever attempting this piece. These rules are in place primarily to be consistent with my own attempts. Secondly, they are in place in the event that I ever have challenger to the record.



Figure 12

Beyond setting a record, this work is also a physical challenge. After about four dozen pencils are in place, the weight begins to pull down on my face. I can't talk or move very much because the pencils begin to slip out. At around eight dozen, it becomes difficult to swallow, again because of the movement of my throat would dislodge the pencils. Even simply taking a breath becomes difficult. Each attempt takes almost twenty five minutes, more than half of which I can hardly move, swallow, or breathe properly. All of these things culminate into an experience that is not simply physically challenging. It also becomes a test of will, a psychological challenge.

“Hat/Hair” is derived from the frustration I face each time I misplace my hat, which is quite often. Unfortunately I thought of this project right after I

shaved my head, so I had to grow out my hair for seven months before styling could begin. Many mornings I have to scramble around trying to find my misplaced hat. The premise of this piece is that if the hat were permanently attached to my head, I could never lose it. It would be even better still if the hat were made out of part of my body. From a practical standpoint, it is in every way utterly useless as a functional hat. It provides very minimal protection from the sun and due to its construction would completely fall apart in the rain. For the final version, my hair was cut, dyed and styled into the shape of the hat. Like much of my work, it is an absurd attempt at solving a relatively simple problem.



Figure 13

Several weeks after the photo shoot, the “hat” was removed from my head by the stylist with razors and scissors. In its removed state, it is still functionally useless as a hat due to its delicacy, since the only thing binding it together is some hair spray and moose.

Chapter 6: Truth in the Experience

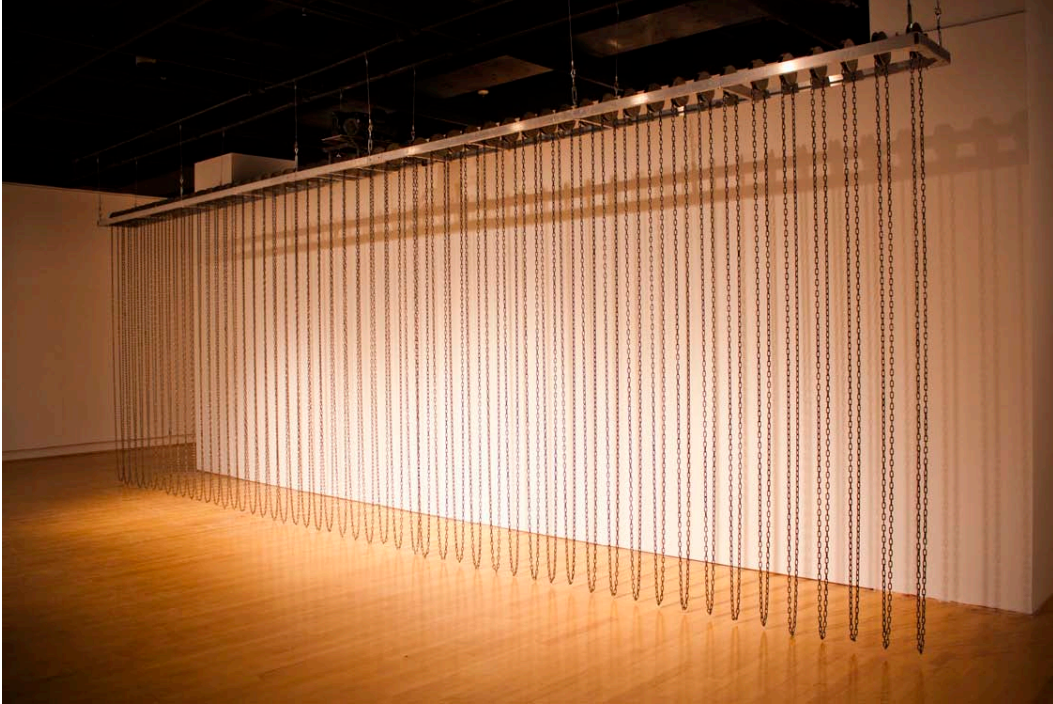


Figure 14

My newest work, “Untitled (chainfall)”, is beginning to deal with perception, or rather using the viewer’s perception of the situation as a fundamental element within the work. It goes back to my roots of creating machines as artworks, but in a much calmer and quieter sublime manner. It sets up a situation for the viewer to get lost in, to alter how they see the work, and give them an opportunity to see complexity within a relatively simple form, specifically a set of moving chains. A single loop of chain has some interesting effects on its own. However, when en masse other optical and physical phenomena reveal themselves. Some viewers become hypnotized, others experience a sort of motion sickness, and still others begin to see things that are

not actually happening, such as the chains speeding up or slowing down, or even patterns emerging due to the play of light and motion.

I am becoming increasingly interested in the experience of the viewer as a critical functional element within artwork. I do not mean the physical interaction between the viewer and the work. It is more of a subconscious psychological effect. Each viewer's experience is unique and personal. We can be led astray by written descriptions and photographs from other viewers. In this sense we can only ever view a work second hand, through someone else's interpretation and experience – their truth of the experience. This is why I find it crucial to actually see the work with one's own eyes, to experience it for oneself.

In the gallery, this piece is able to be seen in isolation. This isolation furthers the personal interaction by giving the viewer only one thing to focus on without any other distractions. It provides a certain level of autonomy necessary to let the viewer loose themselves within the work.

Chapter 7: EPILOGUE

I believe that the unifying theme of the various works previously described is the testing of the limits of the materials. In some instances, the materials are physical, other times conceptual. My experience has led me to believe that the artwork itself must determine how it is made and with what materials and techniques. I understand that ideas must be allowed to evolve into what they must become, and that my role is to lend my hand in the creation of something new.