

ABSTRACT

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TUCK YOUR BOOTS IN

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This thesis discusses my labor experiences and the acquired skills that have been an influential part of my art making process. Developing my own technique and ways of working are very important to me. By nature, I am driven to acquire as many skills as possible. Skills are valuable. It is the desire of still wanting *more* that has led me to make art.

TUCK YOUR BOOTS IN

By

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Chapter 1

My sculptures involve expending vast amounts of energy and labor. The sensorial aspect of creating something with your hands cannot be matched or duplicated. The detachment of that aspect has its place, but there is no better contact than touching something.

Developing my own technique and process for material manipulation is very important to me. Skills are valuable, and by nature I am driven to acquire as many as possible. It is the desire of still wanting more that has led me to make art. This facet of my experience is revealed in the juxtaposition of organic and inorganic materials thereby creating something that is unnatural, unexpected, or illogical. The resulting work is a complicated hybrid that is garnered from many ‘things’: animals, nature, and man-made materials such as traffic cones or thermo-plastic. Combinations of these ideas and elements may produce odd results- some grotesque... or just strange. I use acquired skills to form the foundation of creation. There are no rules, plans or instructions for what I am doing. I cannot watch a how-to video or read an instruction manual. I develop my own hybrid process of cutting, shaping, forming, and jointing. These processes I am developing are a mélange of everything I have learned previously through experience in art making and various technical fields. I create my own language of making. They are all intertwined and influenced by one another.

Chapter 2



Figure 1 Installation View, *Untitled*. Wood, concrete, rebar

I try to work in a paradoxical manner. The material is familiar but the results are not. If a tree naturally grows small to big then I create something that grows big to small. Tree limbs move toward the light and I direct them away...back towards the ground or in improbably horizontal situations. Elements and sections of the pieces grow back into each other... something completely unnatural in form but very natural in origin. Rotted sections grow back... healing themselves to only rot out again, to be propped up and reinforced with steel and concrete. The resulting sculptures are often
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awkward, strange, clumsy, perplexing, and precarious.



Figure 2 In Process Studio View, *Untitled*

I draw on my skill sets and varied labor experiences to fuel my ideas for sculpture. I utilize the materials that are familiar to me and that I have some sort of specific experience or relationship with. The idea is intentionally loose and vague. I may draw or sketch ideas. I may not. Drawing and sketching present a constant battle. The rewards of utilizing drawing for planning and visualization rival the experience of unplanned manipulation of material. It is my familiarity with the materials that becomes creation through the act of repurposing and combining them in a manner

they were not intended for. I romanticize labor, I enjoy the process of work and the honesty of physical labor, and I believe that is reflected in my sculptures. The struggle and energy that has gone into the creation of the piece is often highly visible and integral. You can see where the fluidity of experience collides with the frustrations of the material limits and how those limits are often overcome in a rudimentary manner.

Chapter 3

I was led to nature through my work in the fields of arboriculture, landscaping, and snow removal. Employment in these fields put me in constant contact with the landscape... the ground, the earth and the elements... and so I have a very particular relationship to these things. For example, trees are endlessly interesting to me. Certain types of trees are among the largest living organism on the planet. They have an uncanny ability to adapt and survive. I use my experience as a tree climber to cultivate and influence my ideas for sculptures. I choose to climb where others do not. It is experiential. At this time this is where my work history combines with my art making and the influence is greatest.

Perched high above the ground I have had singular experiences that can translate into singular pieces of work. I have a very intimate relationship with these elements and I exploit the oddities, like the unnatural or uncommon growth within trees. And yet there is a strange dichotomy at work: my *job* is to kill a tree and render it obsolete but instead I salvage whatever is left and start to rebuild. I look at trees, constantly gathering thoughts and ideas. I see our influence on them, how we believe nature should be tailored. It is often illogical and unfounded.

It is really weird to kill something then try to bring it back as it has been demonstrated in the history of art. We see it in classic mythology in the story of Pelops, murdered by his father, put into a soup and then re-assembled and we see this

in modern times in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or the ever-popular zombie films. I intentionally do not use the material as *processed lumber* but as simple limbs, trunks and branches. I *remember* specific sections of trees... uncommon growths of a tree rarely seen, unique in nature. These pieces become uncommon because they are striving to survive. They are seeking out light and energy to such a desperate degree that the result is abnormal. They are trying desperately to heal themselves but to no avail. I see these elements as parts to build with. They have significance and value. Some may be simply unusual. Others are extremely significant, such as a section from a tree that nearly cost me my life. In such a situation the relationship goes beyond finding an interesting piece of tree.



Figure 3 Research Exploration. Uncommon growths

Chapter 4

Tree work is inherently dangerous which leads to a heightened sense of awareness and attention that comes with adrenalin-fueled situations. You see something you want and you go after it. You may lose track of what is the most important thing- your own safety. You want to try to keep a piece intact- not to damage it or destroy it. By doing this you can be putting yourself at great personal risk. I am not a religious or spiritual person but I believe nature is the ultimate creator and destroyer. Things happen that I cannot make or try to do any better so I use these pieces the way they are. Other sections of the sculpture are completely created by hand giving the sculptures certain awkwardness.

In my recent work my ultimate goal is not to recreate or rebuild the *tree* but rather to reference the material, push it further, then hide it... re-skin or re-bark it- lending it to further abstraction. Sometimes I expose the wood surfaces, other times I do not.

The new skin is inorganic. It may be plastic, rubber, polymer, or another synthetic material. The skin material could be many things: fleshy, bone-like, pig-like, dirty, diseased, authentic, used, tortured, fresh, patterned, textured, stitched, stretched, sewn, nailed, hammered, forced, cut, and/or shaped. The materials have been cut apart, re-organized and manipulated in such a fashion that they become almost unrecognizable. The inorganic materials may be traffic cones, carpet padding, thermo plastic, or asphalt. The amalgamation⁸ is what transcends the piece into

something that the viewer is not sure of.

As the process develops further it swings back and forth between loose and rough or detailed and specific. Seemingly the process that has the upper hand is the less technical of the two. My process of destruction directly influences my process of creation. Taking a tree apart is a violent ballet. There is a lot of time spent preparing and climbing and moving things into place all leading up to a swift blow that could wipe out the entire object in one swipe of a chainsaw. Typically I dismantle a tree piece by piece in a specific concert that may seem unorganized but is highly technical and yet still quick and dirty.

There is so much unnatural material that it seems almost inevitable that it combines with what natural material is already here. There are very few things that are pure, almost everything has been affected or infected with something that is inorganic. It is my personal relationship to the materials and the materials' own relationship to the environment that propels the work. I see things or find situations that are very unnatural, they may seem accidental or forced in some manner but they are becoming more and more routine: a repetition of the unnatural, routine in the unnatural. What started as a tree growing around a fence post has evolved into something more. Traffic cones in woods intertwined with trees and brush. Water so polluted with plastic that each becomes the other... inseparable. Conceptually it works because my materials bear such a great importance to the origin of the piece. Once all of the sections of the tree are in place and its substructure is partially covered

or entirely covered, there may be some sort of forced interaction or intersecting of diverging elements, bringing the piece to completion.

Chapter 5

I have developed a unique relationship to the ubiquitous traffic cone. Maybe it is the influence of my childhood playing in a sand box with one or maybe it is the daily commute down the highway that is seemingly always under construction. Regardless of the origin of its influence, the traffic cone has taken a certain level of importance in my work. To me it is an object that has become so common in the landscape that it is almost natural, like the American buffalo. Once they were everywhere, one could shoot blindfolded and not miss. I hunt cones, collect them, prepare them, then utilize them as a material much in the same manner a hunter would prepare a piece of game. I refer to this material I now have in my possession as a skin due to its flesh like qualities. Sometimes the skin is applied to the sculpture to illustrate that forced relationship between the organic and inorganic. I like the authenticity of the skins. Each one is unique like a fingerprint, left out in the elements and altered by its surroundings.



Figure 4 Installation View, *Untitled*. Wood, traffic cones

Chapter 6

Weiwei said that craftsmanship can be used as a tool of investigation that can hopefully lead to a discovery. I am interested in both how industrial materials have been crafted and the purposes for which they have been conceived. People spend countless hours developing a specific material for a very specific reason. I take great enjoyment in using them for a purpose they were never intended for, such as elevating them above their intended environment. After all nature is the ultimate craftsman. I want to mimic that. By taking all of these elements, natural or unnatural, I end up creating my own nature in which unnatural elements have been created to seem to be normal. It is like the apocalyptic Mad Max joining the whimsy of Dr. Seuss- unlikely but not impossible.



Figure 5 Installation View, *Untitled*. Wood, traffic cones

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