[Frame] /-Bridge-/ !Bang! ((Spill)) *Sparkle* (Mapping Mogadore)

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The purpose of this project was to create a body of work that engages the viewer in three-dimensional space. My intent was to construct a multi-media installation that would explore and exploit a video-documented performance. Through the use of projected video as well as video monitors, found object and figurative sculpture, I successfully created an immersive experience for the viewer. I imbued the space with overlapping sensory stimuli including sights, sounds and smells. These layers of information provided a framework for the viewer to create their own narrative, using their own experiences to guide them.
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It has often been my practice to initiate new work by exploring a seemingly random event. The event in this case was inheriting a canoe from a family member. This immediately triggered possible ideas for a performance in which the canoe would play a vital role. I had never been in a canoe before, so my first consideration was how difficult it would be to keep my balance once inside. My thoughts then moved to what would happen if I were to capsize myself. It would be an unusual thing to do in a deep body of water. I was interested in the tension that would result from such an unexpected act. I ultimately decided to create a performance in which I would paddle to the deepest area of a lake, capsize myself and then try to board the canoe. I would persist until I either succeeded or became physically unable to continue. Regardless of the outcome, I felt that the lack of a specific narrative would leave the work’s meaning open to interpretation by the viewer. The struggle to overcome a self-instigated obstacle is a concept that is universal to the human experience. I believed viewers would use their own experiences in their interpretation of the performance.

For my thesis exhibition, I was interested in using the documented performance to create a multimedia installation. I would decide the next step in the process after spending time evaluating the documentation. By studying the resultant footage and taking cues from unplanned visual and auditory components, I developed a process that culminated in the creation of an immersive experience for the viewer. My intent was to expose viewers to an environment that encompassed the totality of an experience: sights, sounds, smells, etc. Rather than limiting the viewer to observing an image or an object, my goal was to create an atmosphere in which the overlapping of sensory stimuli would create a unique, subjective experience for the viewer depending on their location within
the space. The work exhibited both figurative and found object sculpture as well as video art, combining them to form one coherent multi-layered piece.

The basis of the installation was a forty-minute performance that was documented through a digital video recording. I was assisted by two people who followed in a separate boat during the performance. The cinematographer was in charge of the filming, and the artistic director captained the boat. The video was filmed at Mogadore Reservoir. I was dressed in a formal suit as I boarded the canoe and paddled toward the center of the lake. I proceeded to capsize myself. I then attempted to drain and board the canoe once more. As the impossibility of the task became clear, I struggled to paddle the submerged vessel to a nearby island, where I could properly drain and board the canoe for the return journey.

For the location of this exhibition, I chose an empty warehouse building that has several rooms of different size and shape. Viewers first entered a smaller gallery space containing the source video documentation, *The Reservoir Project (Mapping Mogadore)*, shown in its entirety. The room also contained a commercial popcorn maker and movie theater style candy (Plate 1). White handmade rope lighting was placed on the floor, behind which several rows of chairs were provided for viewers. This seating area was arranged directly in front of the video projector, which was placed on a roughly fabricated handmade pedestal. As viewers sat down to watch the video they became part of the display. Their silhouettes were projected on the wall, which partially obscured the

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1 The video was filmed in widescreen format, which is used by the majority of commercial and independent filmmakers. The rectangular shape of the image provided a more interesting format for compositional elements. The cinematographer that filmed the video had knowledge of these elements, and both he and the artistic director were given complete creative control throughout the course of the performance. Presenting each video in this format on widescreen monitors was meant to invoke a cinematic experience, rather than a “home movie” atmosphere if filmed in standard, full-frame format.
projected image. The larger than life projection and popcorn aroma and were meant to provide immediate sensory cues, evoking memories of cinematic experience. Showing the entire documentation in this space functioned to contextualize the seemingly random imagery used in the adjacent space. This room was an ideal location for this part of the exhibition because it is a naturally dark space, which enhanced the cinematic experience.

Viewers then passed through black curtains into the larger gallery space. Titled [Frame] /-Bridge-\ !Bang! ((Spill)) *Sparkle* (Mapping Mogadore), the work in this space consisted of five separate video monitors, handmade rope lighting and figurative elements modeled in clay (Plate 2). Each video monitor displayed a scene from the source video. Varying in length, each excerpt was on a continuous loop that repeated throughout the duration of the installation. The monitors were placed in the space based on the location where the specific excerpt was filmed. This created a map of my documented journey. Each monitor and its corresponding DVD player was displayed on a handmade stand matching the design of the stand used in the smaller space (Plate 3). Blue handmade rope lighting provided a method for delineating the shape of the lake. The lighting was placed on the ground to create a flowing, organic line. At the center of the space resided a double life-sized figurative sculpture. This was an interpretation of a point in the video where I was struggling to paddle the submerged canoe. The protruding tip of the canoe was also modeled in clay several feet in front of the figure. The entire floor within the rope lighting was covered with a hand-spread layer of clay slip that continued partly into the smaller gallery space.

Throughout the course of the documented performance, several unplanned auditory and visual elements were captured. These scenes were individually edited into
short, repeating loops. This allowed me to create an environment in which there would be a continuous flow of auditory and visual information. Since each video was a different length, there was a randomness to how often each would repeat. This resulted in unique experiences for viewers depending on which video monitors they were near. My intent was for viewers to be confronted by inimitable auditory rhythms that would vary as they negotiated the space.

In the first video of the series, [Frame], I was seen as a silhouette paddling the canoe, passing through a frame of light caused by the glare of the sun on the camera lens (Plate 4). Sounds of wildlife could be heard as well as sounds of passing vehicles on a nearby road. In the second video, /-Bridge-/ I paddled under a bridge and emerged out of the other side (Plate 5). I appeared at first as a silhouette and became recognizable upon emerging from under the bridge. As in [Frame], the sounds of the water and wildlife were unexpectedly juxtaposed with the sounds of passing vehicles. The collocation of disparate sounds provided overlapping layers of auditory information. The third video, !BANG!, provided another auditory rhythmic element. The shortest of the videos, !BANG! consisted of what I believed to be gunshots that were fired as I paddled away from the camera (Plate 6). In ((Spill)) I rocked the canoe to intentionally capsize myself (Plate 7). The video loop ends just as the sounds of passing waterfowl fade. In the final video of the series, *Sparkle*, the glare and reflection of the sun functioned to obscure my partially sunken form as I attempted to reach the nearest shore (Plate 8).

Modeled in clay on site and left in its raw state, the figure juxtaposed the
timelessness of heroic statuary\(^2\) with the fleeting temporal existence of the material itself. Denying the object a permanent existence was meant to elicit a sense of the unexpected from the viewer. This self-portrait was modeled very roughly except for the exposed parts of my body, namely my head and hands. The figure was sculpted from the waist up. This created the illusion that it was partly submerged beneath the floor (Plates 9, 10).

Several feet in front of the figure, I modeled the tip of the canoe protruding from the ground (Plates 11, 12). This created an illusory experience in which the viewer could envision the unseen elements in an imaginary area below the floor and outside of the designated gallery space. The figure served as a temporary monument designed to interpret a two dimensional image into a work that engaged the viewer in three-dimensional space.

I strongly believe that the clothing a person chooses to wear is an integral element of their personality. The clothing I chose to wear during the performance suggested my ties to the professional world of retail sales, a period in my life that now seems the distant past. In the professional world, clothing indicates a great deal about the wearer and provides visual clues that purport that person as knowledgeable and trustworthy or, alternately, swarthy and dishonest. I believe that a person’s actions and the direct results of those actions are a truer representation of that person’s knowledge and skills. This façade is no longer a part of me and I no longer claim any ties to it or its allusions. Therefore, for this sculpture I modeled the clothing very roughly. This relegated it to nothing more than form and texture. It is no longer an element in my current self-

\(^2\) My first major sculptural influence was a show at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. The show consisted of Greek statuary that had never been viewed outside Greece. I was in awe of both the level of craftsmanship and the fact that these objects had endured for several millennia.
portrait. This documentation serves as the last record of me wearing the wool suit, which
was rendered unusable due to the nature of the performance.

The clay slip spread across the floor, through its materiality, functioned to
visually connect the disparate sculptural elements in the larger gallery space. Consisting
of the same clay used to model both the figure and the canoe, the slip created a visual
flow between both objects. The slip continued to the edge of the rope lighting (Plate 13).
This also cued the viewer to differentiate between the inner and outer space delineated by
the rope lighting.

The handmade rope lighting served three different functions. Formally, it acted to
provide a line in space that visually framed the rest of the work. It also served to
represent both water and the floor lighting commonly used in movie theaters. Leading
from the smaller gallery space, there was an opening in the lighting that not only
represented the beginning and ending point of my documented journey, but also the area
of the lake in which the water flow originates. Laid out to roughly mimic the shape of
Mogadore Reservoir, the lighting visually divided the space into two areas. The inner
area contained the figurative elements and designated a pathway for viewers to travel
through the space. The ideal viewing of both the figurative elements and the video
monitors was best achieved throughout this inner area. The outer area contained the
monitors on their stands as well as the necessary power cords. The power cords for the
monitors, DVD players and rope lighting all extended to outlets near the ceiling. It was
important that the power cords not interfere with the visual flow of the lighting placed on
the ground.

I chose to construct the rope lighting out of clear vinyl tubing into which blue
string lights had been inserted (Plate 13). Blue lights were used to emulate the water that they represented. The lighting being displayed at floor level was meant to suggest the lighting used in the same manner in movie theaters. This provided a material connection to the floor lighting in the smaller gallery space. To echo the simple construction of the monitor stands, the lighting was assembled with tape, cords and plugs in plain view. This evidence of the hand was an important juxtaposition against the sleek, streamlined design of the video monitors and the seeming lack of the handmade in the videos themselves. Since the DVDs used in the exhibition were mechanical reproductions of the original video footage, it was important that the exhibition contain handmade elements in addition to these reproductions.

The German cultural critic Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, was concerned with the lack of authenticity inherent in any mechanically reproduced work of art. Tracing the history of reproduction from printmaking to photography and finally to film, Benjamin declares, “That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art”.3 The aura referred to by Benjamin is the sense of uniqueness inherent in a handmade object due to its originality and history. Benjamin argues that works of art such as editioned prints, photographs and films destroy this aura by denying or diminishing authenticity or originality. He believes that since these reproductions cannot be differentiated from the original, the authenticity of the original is lost. This point is illustrated by his purporting that, “From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to

ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense’.

I believe Benjamin’s theory applies to the videos in this exhibition, since each was an exact reproduction of the source material. Existing first on a digital videotape, and then on my computer’s hard drive, it is impossible to argue any originality in its subsequent state as a video DVD. This is a common hurdle experienced by any artist using video as their primary medium. The resulting work can be construed as possessing no inherent aura, which I believe may undermine its authenticity and originality. This is not to say that video art is devoid of any aura, but that its aura might be severely diminished. By including objects fabricated from found objects and raw materials as well as handmade figurative elements, I have attempted to bring an aura back to the project. This instills within the work a sense of uniqueness and authenticity through the objects’ preciousness, materiality and history.

At the core of this project lies my interest in film as a medium and cinema as experience. Movie trailers, through their snappy editing of often disparate scenes, attempt to encapsulate the sum of the film being advertised. This instills curiosity within the viewers, driving them to spend their time and money on experiencing the end product. I view the total of the objects and images in the larger gallery as an “advertisement” for the entire film, shown separately within the larger gallery space. Here viewers had the opportunity to experience the event in its entirety. With viewers no longer bombarded by seemingly random images and sounds, the narrative is solidified temporally with a distinct beginning, middle and end.

Unlike most feature films, The Reservoir Project (Mapping Mogadore) did not

4 Benjamin, Ibid.
force a narrative onto the viewer. However, I did provide a variety of visual information that allowed the viewer to create his or her own narrative. The intent of the performance was never made clear and the actions I take were never justified. To me, the performance represented the overcoming of self-made obstacles, both major and minor, that I have struggled with as a student, teacher, husband and father. Since these examples are common human struggles, I do not feel that providing this information is necessary to the reading of the work.

As they viewed the exhibit, viewers were inundated with overlapping auditory rhythms created through the specific placement of the video monitors. Each video loop was a different length and was set to repeat at a time incongruous with the other videos. This provided a situation where auditory stimuli would vary depending on the location of the viewer as well as the specific time the viewer was experiencing the auditory elements. This juxtaposition of disparate auditory rhythms is known in musical terms as xenochrony. A xenochrographic composition is produced by two or more musicians playing different melodies in different time signatures. The musical technique has been a significant influence in my work, but I modified the approach by introducing a randomness achieved through the slightly different point in which each video repeated. As with the reasoning behind the performance, the Mapping Mogadore phrase used in both titles was left unexplained. I did, however, provide visual clues for the viewer to consider its meaning, namely the shape of the rope lighting display and the specific

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Xenochrony was developed and coined by American composer Frank Zappa in the 1960s. Throughout his musical career, Zappa used this technique to create new and inventive musical compositions. In these compositions, each rhythm can be discerned upon intense examination. Together they create a jumbled auditory sensation that is confusing, yet follows its own specifically ordered methodology.
placement of each video monitor. Some viewers may have read these as arbitrary
decisions, but for others they provided just enough information as to be deemed relevant
to the conception of the work. Ultimately, this question of the significance of mapping
was for viewers to contemplate in communion with each other.

Through its larger than life display, as well as larger than life personalities of the
individuals connected with it, cinema feebly attempts to instill within itself a fabricated
aura severely lacking in its display and distribution. When we have a cinematic
experience, we are merely viewing one of thousands of mechanical reproductions of the
original film. It would be hard to argue that one person’s experience is more unique or
authentic than the rest. Many artists have capitalized on this concept, treating film as a
found object to be explored and exploited. Artists using this approach often succeed in
creating works that possess a renewed aura due to the resulting originality of the work’s
mode of display. This artistic practice has recently caught my attention, and has
subsequently become a major influence for this body of work. Artists such as Douglas
Gordon⁶, Cory Archangel⁷ and Curtis Mitchell⁸ have all experimented with this mode of
working. As with their works, this exhibition shared the idea of foregoing the inherent
narrative of the original film in an attempt to create a new narrative due to the varied

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⁶ Gordon’s *24 Hour Psycho (1993)* is a large-scale projection of Alfred Hitchcock’s famous film. Gordon
has slowed the footage so that it repeats only once in every twenty-four hour period. This method disrupts
the original narrative which can only be reestablished by viewers who are familiar with the original film.
⁷ Archangel’s *Untitled Translation Exercise (2006)* is another example of an artist appropriating an entire
film to be modified into a new work. In this piece, Archangel has taken Richard Linklater’s film, *Dazed
and Confused*, and re-dubbed the entire audio track. He sent the script to India where a group of people,
who were not actors, recorded themselves reading each line. Archangel then seamlessly edited the new
audio elements into the existing video footage and it is displayed on a widescreen monitor with several
pairs of headphones provided for viewers. The original narrative of the film is disrupted due to the new
audio, which is incongruous to the images on the screen. The juxtaposition of people with a foreign accent
stumbling through their lines, paired with characters from white, 1970’s suburbia, upsets the narrative in
unexpected and comedic ways.
⁸ Mitchell differs from both Gordon and Archangel in that he appropriates only partial scenes, rather than
treatment of the source material.

Similar to the aforementioned practices of artists Douglas Gordon, Cory Archangel and Curtis Mitchell, with this body of work I wanted to treat the filmed performance in a way that would transform the original narrative. By fragmenting the source video and then reconstructing portions into a work that simultaneously reflected and differentiated itself from the original, my intent was to investigate the documentation and exploit unplanned auditory and visual aspects to create an immersive experience for the viewer. I chose to explore an event that was quite personal to me, yet esoteric from the viewer’s perspective. My intent was to create a new experience that challenged the viewer’s expectations. By choosing to use video art, as well as the more traditional approaches of found object and figurative sculpture, I created a body of work that draws on a variety of influences. Through the employment of a variety of sensory stimuli, the installation provided a coherent methodology for the exploration and display of multiple layers of information. These layers of information provided a framework for the viewer to create their own narrative, using their own experiences to guide them.

An example would be Godfather (2007), in which Mitchell appropriates the death scene of the main character, Don Corleone. For this piece, Mitchell has digitally removed the face of the character in the scene. On the floor in front of the projected image is a stack of logs resting on an altered c-print. The projector is placed in a way that creates a silhouette of the logs, partially obscuring the projected image. The print was created by Mitchell stepping into chemicals designed to react with the paper as he then recreates the entire scene by imitating the character’s actions. The result is a documentation of the act through which a new piece is created. Mitchell has explored and exploited the original scene, designating himself as the main character in the creation of a new, arguably more compelling narrative.
Plate #1

Installation View, Small Gallery Space
Plate #2

Installation View, Large Gallery Space
Plate #3

Video Monitor, Monitor Stand, 60’’ x 35’’ x 20’’
Plate #4

[Frame], Video Still
Plate #5

/-Bridge-\, Video Still
Plate #6

!Bang!, Video Still
Plate # 7

((Spill)), Video Still
Plate #8

*Sparkle*, Video Still
Plate #9

Figure, 84” x 72” x 58”
Clay, plaster, steel, wood
Plate # 10

Figure, (Detail)
Plate #11

Figure and Canoe, Installation View
Plate #12

Figure and Canoe, Installation View
Plate #13

Clay Slip and Rope Lighting (Detail), Dimensions Variable
REFERENCES