REPOSITORIES OF CONCIOUSNESS

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

My working process is intuitive. Using the elements of form, color, light, mass, transparency, glass, and reflection, I make glass sculptures that display ideas about human interaction, experience and perception. My sculptures are ambiguous, anthropomorphic, and childlike and my forms relate to cartoons: they are sketches of instances. The artworks presented in my thesis exhibition, Repositories of Consciousness hold remnants of my consciousness.
Dedicated to my wonderful parents.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout this process, I have benefited from generous help and advice from many people in my life. I am deeply appreciative and thankful to all of you.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters:</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Repositories of Consciousness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lantern</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Description</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Evaluation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Symbols</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Description</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Analysis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Interpretation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Evaluation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Sticker Project</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Analysis</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Description</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Interpretation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Evaluation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Figures</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Analysis</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Description</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Interpretation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Evaluation</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intrinsic Translations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Description</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Analysis</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Interpretation</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Evaluation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The Kissing Disease, It's Always Something</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Description</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Analysis</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Interpretation</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Evaluation</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Medium</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Description</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Interpretation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Evaluation</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Description</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Analysis</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Interpretation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 Evaluation</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sumeru</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1 Description</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2 Analysis</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3 Interpretation</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4 Evaluation</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 <em>Repositories of Consciousness</em>, installation view</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 <em>Lantern</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 <em>Lantern</em>, detail</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Installation view of <em>Interface</em>, <em>Toroid</em> and <em>Distill</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 <em>Toroid</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 <em>Interface</em></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 <em>Distill</em></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 <em>Kami's Sticker</em>, actual size</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 <em>Obey Sticker</em> by Shepard Fairey, actual size (Fairey)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Group of characters</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 <em>Black Venus</em> by Niki de Saint Phalle (Hatje)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 <em>Imbue</em></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 <em>Imbue</em>, detail</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Mica grouping</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 <em>Ethereal</em>, front and detail</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 <em>Deter</em>, front and back</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 <em>Exponential</em>, front and back</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 <em>Dispel</em></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Intrinsic Translation, installation view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Intrinsic translation, detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Holographic Intrinsic Translations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Holographic Intrinsic Translations detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>It's Always Something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>It's Always Something, detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>It's Always Something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy, detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy, installation view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy, participation view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Hon by Niki de Saint Phalle (Hatje)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Sumeru, front, exterior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Sumeru, back, exterior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Sumeru, interior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sumeru, detail of refraction through portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1</td>
<td>Grain Silo Over Train Tracks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2</td>
<td>Bhaja Stupa, 2nd century B.C. (Huntington, J)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3</td>
<td>Horiuji Pagoda, 710 A.D. (Huntington, J)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.4</td>
<td>Tarot Garden, interior view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.5</td>
<td>Peep Show, by Yayoi Kusama (Zelvansky, Hoptman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.6</td>
<td>Substitution Light Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.7</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

REPOSITORIES OF CONCIousNESS

My thesis show was organized for a 2,400 square foot exhibition space off campus. I structured it as an interplay between five different manifestations of my artwork: conceptual, in Chapter 3, The sticker Project; objects, in Chapter 4, Figures; projection, in Chapter 5, Intrinsic Translations; site specific, in Chapter 8, Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy; and architectural space, in Chapter 9, Sumeru.

The works in Repositories of Consciousness represent, in common, the point where my thoughts and ideas have been expressed and are held in time and glass. In the following pages, I describe the meaning and emotion behind the artwork that has been the focal point of my undergraduate and graduate work, as well as my life.
CHAPTER 1

LANTERN

Figure 1.1: Repositories of Consciousness, installation view

1.1

Lantern was the gateway to the exhibition Repositories of Consciousness. It sat next to my artist statement and served as a welcoming piece similar to a lantern at the entrance of a Buddhist temple. It is a desiccating jar, roughly the same shape as a stupa or Buddhist temple, and inside it are thirty tiny glass stupas that I made as a form study during research for a History of Ancient Chinese Buddhist Art class. I took three Buddhist, history of art classes. The Buddhist philosophy I learned has had a profound impact on my artwork.
1.2

Much of the Buddhist philosophy and iconography is based on ideas which are internal and do not tangibly exist. They strongly rely on the viewer visualizing beyond the iconography. In ancient Buddhist art, the sculptures are to remind the viewer of what is unreal. My work acts in the same fashion, where the use of imagination is frequently required.

1.3

The inside of Lantern contains translucent stupas that I sandblasted and transparent stupas that reflect light dramatically. Because of this combination, the piece actually glows the way that a lantern would when it is lit. On the same pedestal, I put my signature book and stickers for people to take. My intention was that the Lantern would draw people in to sign the book and take stickers. I was making the pedestal a welcoming station with a gift to take home.
Figure 1.2: Lantern
Figure 1.3: Lantern, detail
CHAPTER 2
SYMBOLS

2.1
In the exhibition, groupings of symbols were placed close to the entrance because these pieces define the symbols that I use in all of the other work. These transparent glass pieces designated a neutral area in the space, as they had no color, while most of the other work did. Shown in a group, they are meditations on the definitions of each symbol. I developed a language using these symbols. When I create the figures, the symbols combine in different ways and translate into emotional responses.

2.2
My creative process begins with stream of consciousness drawings that I make when I am in a group of people and conversation is going on. I quickly draw abstract figures that are reactions to the feelings I glean from those around me. Each figure is a selection of certain symbols that I inadvertently combine to create very individual reactions. Most of my characters are happy, while some are excited, shocked, depressed, mean, hopeful, and more.
2.3

There are five basic symbols I utilize during this process to translate the emotions or mechanisms, which I interpret when I make my drawings. The names that I have given them are toroid, window, legs, roof, and energy.

The toroid means open or positivity, the window stands for interface, the legs mean safety, the roof is protection and the energy is exchange. There are variations and stylizations of these specific symbols, but these five remain the foundation of my aesthetic code.

Figure 2.1: Installation view of Interface, Toroid and Distill
The toroid form is the shape of a donut, and I make it in glass, either open with a large hole in the center, or closed with only the suggestion of a hole in the center. It means positivity and opening. The idea behind this form is best explained by relating it to the philosophy and practice of acupuncture, where the desired goal is to open a blocked meridian in order to allow the positive energy to flow properly. The result is the overall health of the individual, mentally and physically. Having experienced miraculous results through these practices, I believe that this is the most important symbol I use. In my sculptures, an open torus means that my perception at that moment is of positive energy and an open mind or heart. Different sizes of openings define varying degrees that the heart is open.

Figure 2.2: Toroid
The window form means interface, and is a symbol that is either a square divided into four quadrants or a rectangle divided into six sections. This shape resembles windowpanes in early Chinese imperial architecture. It symbolizes the interface that we use to interact with the world. Most of us have different ways that we interact with those around us, and the window form translates how that interface is built out of our own perception and the perception of others. The window is always made out of transparent glass and has optical properties, which cause refraction and the image behind the window to be slightly distorted. This emphasizes the idea that our perception is unique and when we look at a situation or person, it is through our own experience that we see.
The two legs give me a way to add the characteristic of height, and my figures take on an anthropomorphic appearance. The legs are always on the bottom of the figure and support the other shapes in the same way that legs on an anatomical figure would. They give the structure safety because of the height they give to the other forms, keeping them out of harm’s way. This part of the language is taken from my love of tree houses and preference for living on the second floor. I have always had a fascination with tree houses. When I was younger, I spent most of my time climbing trees. The thought of living in a tree evokes strong feelings of nostalgia for me. My feeling is that when you are high above the ground, you are safe from intruders or threats. The idea of active safety is the function of the leg form, keeping the other symbols out of harm’s way.

The roof stands for protection because it covers the special parts that need to be kept comfortably, passively safe. Safety and security is a very important issue and it comes in many shapes and sizes represented by the roof symbol in my work. The roof form is always on top of the figure. I am attracted to the rooflines associated with Buddhist temples, stupas, pagodas and my roof shape curves that come naturally when sculpting with hot glass. It is influenced by many sources of rooflines, but in this series, I utilize
mainly the architectural aesthetic of the Chinese curved roof that is characteristic of imperial buildings in ancient China.

Often, the characters, which are a combination of the different forms, exchange energy. This symbol consists of lines that project from the form, like rays of light in a child's drawing of the sun. These lines are a very important aspect of the ideas behind my art, because of the emotional exchange they infer. I pay particular attention to personal interaction in the experience of my own life. Some people give energy, others take energy, some people are neutral. This is a cycle of life that I have always found dazzling. This interaction creates a pattern that subtly occurs in everyday life.

When I display the groupings of symbols, I like to lay them out in the patterns similar to fractals so that one larger form gives birth to several smaller forms. This allows the forms to push and pull from large to small, and gives interest to the simple shapes that would not normally be very dramatic. I am fascinated with fractal patterns and have discovered that they are associated with light, reflection, nature, and universal patterns. All of these elements are distinctive aspects of my artwork.
2.4

In other series of work, these symbols are often combined to form figures that express specific emotional instances or reactions. The piece *Distill* (Figure 2.4) is a grouping of several transparent glass figures. I combine the symbols toroid, window, legs, roof, and energy to express more complex ideas and emotional responses.
CHAPTER 3
THE STICKER PROJECT

Figure 3.1: Kami’s Sticker, actual size

3.1
At one time, I worked for a woman who made wholesale jewelry. When I first met her, she gave me a pair of earrings, completely to my surprise. I later learned that it is her trademark gesture to give the lower price point jewellery that she makes to her friends and people she meets. Her gesture definitely jump-started our friendship. It always impressed me and I wished that I could give my art to others in the same way. However, I make glass
sculptures that cost a great deal to make. It has always been financially unwise for me to give my art away. Therefore, I was really excited when I came up with the idea to make a sticker of one of my abstract figure drawings. With their minimal cost, I am now able to give away my artwork and make others feel special; the same way that my friend does with her jewelry.

Figure 3.2: Obey sticker by Shepard Fairey.
actual size (Fairey)

The work of Shepard Fairey, a well-known graffiti and propaganda artist, has always intrigued me. Fairey uses the image of Andre the Giant, a well-known figure in the history of professional wrestling, on stickers, posters, patches, and many other forms of promotional media. These images have
been distributed in mass quantities and placed on various objects that can be easily seen by the public. Fairey's *Obey Campaign* had an international impact and his website shows images of his stickers that have been stuck all over the world. Fairey says the distribution of his icon is about his identity or image becoming a phenomenon and is not rooted in the promotion of a political cause or product and the icon does not actually mean anything. This makes people more aware of the stickers because they become curious about it. After researching his work, I began to consider my own idea of an icon and what would happen if I gave it away to almost everyone I met.

3.2

I made an icon that is a conglomeration of the figures I draw and the ideas that I express with my drawings. It represents most of the characteristics of my drawings in one image. My stickers are of a moderate size, about two inches by three inches. I wanted them to be roughly the size of a business card, because business cards are a way that people distinguish their identity. The stickers are made of very high quality vinyl and are black and white; the image is white and the background is black. Being weather resistant, they do not crack or fade in the sun and rain.
3.3

When I am actively administering The Sticker Project, I give my stickers to people I know, people I meet, and especially people who do something nice. My goal is to actively give them away until I have distributed ten thousand. I have already given away roughly fifteen hundred stickers. When I first began the project I tried to develop a protocol of specifically when the stickers would be given, however, I learned that much like my other work the process had to be intuitive. The stickers are given when the time is right and the interaction will be positive. Through the experiences of giving, I have learned that if the sticker is given too soon its capacity of acting as an innocent gift is deflated. It is essential that I give the sticker at a moment when it will be perceived as a positive action in order for it to assume the role of a gift. When someone receives a gift, it is human nature and a historically proven idea that they feel a bond with the giver. When a gift is given with no ego, there is an inevitable return because it enters the cycle of life. When the return occurs, the best way to continue the cycle is to again pass it on. In the case of my stickers, the physical gift is the sticker, but the intrinsic value is in the act of giving it away and the positive notion that it perpetuates.
Often when I travel, I meet people who live in different places and they take the stickers back to where they are from. In the United States they have gone to Ohio, Washington, Oregon, California, Louisiana, Georgia, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Colorado, Texas, Missouri, Michigan, New Mexico and probably many other destinations that I am unaware of. The stickers have also been given to people who live in countries other than the United States such as Canada, Australia, Singapore, Japan, England, Mexico, and Norway.

I have made a vow to myself to never illegally post my stickers. My personal interest in the project is about the interaction of giving the sticker as a gift; what people do with them and where they put them is a by-product. However, since the beginning of the project, my stickers have been sighted in a variety of places. They are visible on cars, signs and lampposts in Columbus, Ohio and other parts of the United States. They have also been seen in England, Australia and Canada. A friend of mine decided to use the image of my sticker for a tattoo on her back. It is the focal point of a large tattoo that covers her entire back. She calls it her protection symbol.
CHAPTER 4
FIGURES

4.1
There is a notion in Buddhism that it is important to act in perfect faith or a state of faithful consciousness. People give offerings or puja to the Buddha for a wish, as thanks or as a lesson that will bring them closer to enlightenment. John Huntington told me a story about a family that brought one hundred thousand tiny bowls of rice to the shrine of a Buddha as thanks for good fortune they had been given. The idea is that an act will be repeated enough times so that it becomes a meditative gesture and the mind will become absent allowing a lesson from the Buddha to be passed on.
I have been making these figures for six years, and I plan to continue to make them until I know that I have made one in perfect faith, without ego or any other thought in mind. I come closer to perfecting them and the forms become more refined each year. The idea of repeating an action in order to become a better person and learn about oneself is interesting. I have definitely grown in the time that I have been making these figures, and I know that when I am done making them I will be in a different place and if not a better person, I will at least be a better one.

4.2

My figures have an anthropomorphic appearance. I intentionally create the relationship between them looking like a human figure and a house because one of the most important factors behind this work is the idea of the body being a home for the mind and that the emotions that we experience have an effect on our bodies.

I always make conscious decisions when creating colored glass sculpture, to keep in mind which colors magnify different emotional responses. I have explored chromotherapy from a variety of perspectives including natural health, marketing, feng shui and biology. Through this exploration, I have learned of some interesting theories relating to emotions, health, well-being, light and the way that our bodies operate; for example, the idea that emotions have an effect on our health and well-being.
My interest in artwork by Niki De Saint Phalle influences the unique gesture and animated quality of my work. She makes figures that are playful and full of life with bright colors and active, energetic gesture. The large figures De Saint Phalle makes are whimsical, and look like they are from a fantasyland that is directly out of her imagination. This kind of quality in her work is most evident in her glass colored figures. Like her figures, my glass sculptures have their own personality with bright colors, a distinctive stylization, and an active gesture.
Figure 4.2: *Black Venus* by Niki de Saint Phalle (Hafte)
In the past, I applied color to my sculptures by using frits and powders, which are crunched up bits of colored glass that I melted onto the outside of the form I was making. More recently, I am using a technique involving solid chunks of color. With this technique, I make a rounded cup using a single color. As I am making the cup, I apply details to it that add visual interest. Then, I gather clear molten glass to the size of the cup and stuff the glass into the cup. Once all of the details are on the outside of the solid glass I sculpt it into any shape that I choose. This technique is far more refined than simply using crunched up glass to put color on the outside.
Another innovation in my work has been the use of mica. In the past three years I developed various steps and safety precautions in order to combine this sparkling mineral with my glass. Mica in powder form is extremely light and easily floats in the air when it is agitated. I learned to gather molten glass, completely set up the initial shape of the glass and gently roll it in the mica only one time. The mica only sticks to the glass, it does not stick to itself. Once the mica is on the surface of the hot glass, it tends to fume or exude gasses. If more glass is gathered on top of the mica before the gasses have escaped it will cause bubbles in the glass. The coating of mica must be heated before more glass is gathered on top of it. The mica creates a very thin layer that can be ground away, while the glass is hot, to reveal the glass again. This attribute allows me to draw images on the glass very easily and quickly.
Once I gather over the mica, I can then repeat the process and build up layers of the fine particles, which creates an unusual effect inside the glass. Sometimes I do not gather over the mica, but rather I leave it on the outside of the glass. If I chose to do this, no more glass will stick to the outside unless I grind away the mica where I want to attach more glass. This creates a challenge, but the esthetic of mica on the exterior of the glass is unusual and often worth it.

4.3

Titles are a very important part of my work. Part of my working process is to write lists and most often those lists are of interesting words that I have researched. When naming each piece, I consider the emotion it depicts, the gesture it holds, the colors that have been used and the way those attributes combine to produce an overall feeling.

Two good examples of the way that I develop my titles are the sculptures Ethereal and Deter. They each have distinctive titles that describe these pieces well and are representative of the attributes I draw the titles from.
Ethereal, shown in figure 4.6, is otherworldly and the round symbol of this piece looks like a pink planet Jupiter. I combined the colors of all of the parts in a way that they appear similar to a sunset made of blue, purple and pink. Finally, mica blended into the colors of the sunset looks distinctively like stars very far away and the star on the side of it has a graphic relationship to the solar system.
In figure 4.7, the piece Deter is keeping negativity away. The blue and green colors of this piece represent the serenity of the land and sea, while the transparent forms act like ozone deterring any harmful energy away. The large "X" that is on the circular symbol is a type of warning much like the label on a bottle of poison that is telling volatile entities not to come near.
The ideas behind my characters or figures are deeply rooted in my personal philosophies. Consequently, they are a good example of the title of my thesis exhibition, *Repositories of Consciousness*, because they are exact interpretations of specific emotional reactions. These reactions range from large reactions of dramatic, life-changing situations to small reactions of passing day-to-day instances. *Deter* (Figure 4.7) is a reaction to a situation in a relationship in which I felt betrayed, hurt, angry, disappointed and taken advantage of. The circumstances required that I define an emotional boundary to protect myself. I used the symbols in *Deter* to express my reaction of anguish to the situation. The serene colors that I used balance out the strong emotions of the reaction. The sculpture itself serves as a protective entity that deters any more harmful acts from occurring.
Figure 4.8: Exponential, front and back
Figure 4.9: Display
CHAPTER 5

INTRINSIC TRANSLATIONS

The idea behind Intrinsic Translation is that we all have an impact on each other and the energy that we emit effects those around us.

5.1

The original Intrinsic Translation (figures: 5.1 and 5.2) involved transparent glass sculptures, a screen created by a white sheet of plexi glass, an overhead projector, and one of my drawings on a transparency. The drawing was projected onto the screen, the transparent glass sculptures were in front of the screen and the drawing was reflected through the screen, onto the glass sculptures. The drawings came through the optical distortion of the glass and were at different shapes and sizes. Another element projected was a small glass figure that was placed on the projector. It created a dark shadow in the shape of the figure and was dispersed through parts of the glass sculptures in front.
The space, where *Repositories of Consciousness* was held had, an entire wall of windows. This feature gave the work in the space a strong natural light source, making it difficult to create a projection in the space. To resolve this issue, I had holograms made that held a similar esthetic using the light, reflection and refraction, but did not require a dark room.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 5.1: Intrinsic Translation* installation view
5.2

I am defining the interconnected relationship between individuals and the universe. If one form is dark and cluded, we all pick up a little bit of that. Even if our reaction to this dark entity is not enough that we notice it directly, it has an impact on our daily routine. Sometimes when I am minding my own business, someone I come into contact with is surprisingly rude or mean to me. After this interaction, depending on a variety of circumstances, such as my mood, confidence, or relationship with that person, I may internalize the anger, or allow it to bounce right off of me.

5.3

This cause and effect can be good and bad, because depending on who picks it up, it can be distorted and made to be negative or it can be transformed and translated into something positive and interesting. It all depends on perspective. The transparent glass forms I make are perfect for exemplifying that because they enhance the refraction and distortion of whatever reflects through them.

5.4

The *Holographic Intrinsic Translations* were in my thesis exhibition. The holograms had my drawings reflecting through glass figures and being morphed depending on the shape and optical quality of the glass. The image was small, easily read and holographic which had a more refined
quality than the original. The holograms were displayed on stands I fabricated from steel rod and glass toroids. The stands acted as legs, which gave them an active gesture that is characteristic of my work. Overall, these works define one of the ways that I believe the world works with color, light, reflection, and my figures as the translators.
Figure 5.3: Holographic Intrinsic Translations, installation view
Figure 5.4: Holographic Intrinsic Translations, detail
6.1

My mom gave me the cushions. They were from a couch that we had when I was growing up. Everyone in my family agrees that it was the most comfortable couch anyone ever sat on. It was the couch in our family room, where the television was. For the entirety of my adolescent life it was the focal point of my existence. It was where I watched television after school,
before my parents got home and chores started. It was where I hung out with my friends, did my homework, ate many meals, spent quality time with my parents, and even snuggled with my boyfriend. It was also where I recuperated when I was sick. There were many times that I slept on that couch, terribly sick, barely able to breathe, and felt miserable. The chairs on the ends would recline and the angle that they would lean back was just right so that my sinuses could drain and I would not get stuffed up, which was comforting.

In the summer of my first year of graduate school at The Ohio State University, I got sick with mononucleosis. Mononucleosis is an acute disease characterized by fever, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes, and extreme exhaustion. Some believe that it can be transmitted by kissing; therefore it is called "the kissing disease". For at least three months I had been tired and just kept working. Then I became too tired to function, discovered I had mono and had to go home to recover. When I went home, the couch that I had grown up with was no longer there. I was the most sick I had ever been in my life and the most comfortable couch ever was not there for me.

Later that fall, my mom brought me some unapoloistered cushions because she knew that I had been working with foam. I immediately recognized that the cushions she brought me were special, and that they were from the
couch I had grown up on. They were really unusual looking because they
were the insides of the couch, the part that you do not often see. I decided
that each pillow would be used to create an image of four distinctive
characters.

6.2
I chose to paint the cushions with neon colors to create bold, bright entities
that would catch attention to themselves. There is glitter around the edges of
each pillow, adding a dramatic flair, and again calling for attention. These
flashy qualities are supposed to draw your focus away from the actual
drooping, struggling gesture of the pillows. I have had many experiences
with people who are truly good at heart and act in a jovial way, drawing
attention to themselves with their charismatic energy. After getting to know
these people better, I sometimes notice a deep sadness that they cover up
with their jokes and entertaining behavior.

In my glass characters, this entertaining behavior is made visible by the
bright colors and glitter and the transparent glass, while the heavy glass
button weighing them down represents the sadness that is not always so
obvious. I painted the cushions in a way that resembles the painted face of
a clown. I did this because there is a stereotype about clowns that they
have a secret sadness, covered up by their bright, dazzling costume.
Sometimes, the paint on their face becomes smudged or worn away.
revealing the reality of their existence. The neon spray paint that I painted the cushions with is corrosive and will weaken the fabric of the cushions and fade over time, just like a clown's face paint that wears away. Eventually, the luster is lost and the internal sadness is revealed.

The large glass button that is sewn on top of each is the same shape as the symbol it covers. The buttons are thick, transparent glass that act as a lens and magnify the painting underneath. The buttons add a strain to the form of the cushion and cause it to crinkle and shrink under its weight. With this weight, the pillows become gestured and active, which is a quality that tends to be inherent in most of my work. It adds to the lively outward appearance of the forms. This activity also caused the paint under and around the button to become worn and cracked which signified its external luster being worn away.

6.3

We all have attributes that when they are over emphasized or highlighted, can add strain to our lives. The glass buttons represent the attribute that has become negative because life is unbalanced. The strain caused by the weight and the wear of the button is evidence that this imbalance has lasting effects on the puffy form of the cushion.
6.4

This piece is linked to my experience having mono. I appeared to be happy and normal on the outside, but I was actually feeling miserable on the inside. From time to time my veneer would bust apart and be accidentally revealed to the world. This experience is evident in the pillows because there is a corner where the stuffing of one of the pillows has burst out and the glittery insides are exposed.

The experience of having mono was one of most life changing events that I have encountered. I have experienced and grown from other hardships, however the sickness I faced permanently changed my lifestyle and my mindset. For an extended period of time I endured the symptoms of the mono that no one could see. I learned a great deal about my environment and myself. I am now thankful for the changes that took place and I reflect upon the piece It's always something as a reminder of where I have been and what I have learned.
Figure 6.2: It’s Always Something, detail
CHAPTER 7

MEDIUM

7.1

Medium is made of three desiccating jars that are found objects. They remind me of the shape of stupas or round buildings that are used as Buddhist Temples. The jars are filled with the materials that I use to add sparkle to my artwork: mica, glass and glitter. I use the term “medium” as slang that defines my state of being.

In terms of my state of being, Medium means that I am feeling in the middle, not good or bad. I began using the term “medium” when I was sick with mononucleosis. When people asked me how I was feeling, it made me feel uncomfortable. I am ordinarily a positive, cheerful person and feeling terrible most of the time deflated my positive attitude. I am also an honest person and when someone asks me how I am, I usually give an accurate adjective. It is out of my character to have a negative attitude, and because I was unable to be honestly positive, I decided to be honestly neutral. By saying that I was medium, the questioner was distracted by the novelty of the statement. Quickly, the subject was changed and I could talk about subjects other than how I was feeling.
By naming the piece *Medium*, I am linking the moderate emotion of feeling of mediocre health to the positive feelings I associate with materials that sparkle. By changing the definition of the emotion I associate with “medium” to the context of sparkle, it becomes a positive notion. I like to use materials that sparkle because to me they remind me of the initial feeling that I get when something exciting and happy occurs. That excited feeling is one of the most distinctive influences in my artwork.

7.2

Most of the time, when foreign materials are added to hot glass, they will cause the glass to crack. Mica is a mineral that usually does not affect hot glass as it cools. Therefore, the mica can be added to hot glass without
damage. It comes in a variety of colors and sizes, but I prefer to use a more refined form that is fine in texture and is the color silver. It most closely resembles manufactured glitter.

I am a glassworker, and I have been practicing my skills and techniques working with glass for several years now, and it has become my main area of expertise. I was initially drawn to glass as an art material because of the voluptuous forms it is able to achieve and the bright colors it comes in. When transparent glass is used alone it can become sparkly. The highlights from light reflecting off of the glass are tiny spots of light that sparkle.

Glitter sparkles have all of the qualities that I have just described to be energizing and important to my work. A man named Mr. Ruschman, in New Jersey, just after World War II, invented glitter. He now owns Meadowbrook Inventions, which has been the world’s leading manufacturer and supplier of glitter for over fifty years. Glitter’s reflective properties have transformed my work and achieved an extreme level of kitsch that almost surpasses kitsch. Finding Mr. Ruschman’s company has allowed me to express myself artistically in a way that I never would have been able to had I not had access to ten-pound, wholesale bags of glitter.
7.3

As homage to materials that sparkle, the piece *Medium* holds mica, glass and glitter. When I look into the jars I see infinite light and reflection, which makes me feel happy, and it was important to me to distinguish these unique elements in my thesis exhibition.
CHAPTER 8

HOLDING EXHAUSTION/ GAINING ENERGY

8.1

_Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy_ is an installation that I made specifically for a back room in the 1855 Gallery space, where I held my thesis exhibition. This small room was off of the main room and the only access the viewer had to the space was a large window to see inside it. It consisted of a dark room, containing a pile of foam figures painted in neon colors, lit with blacklights. The viewer observed the work through a window that was partly obstructed by a curtain of mirrors, in a checkerboard pattern. Inside the room, the neon foam figures in a pile were highlighted by the blacklight and represented the spent energy in the atmosphere. My intention was to make the dark room like a diorama, with a static setting on the inside, and the mirrors like a filter of reflection on the outside.

8.2

I made the mirror curtain while I was doing experimentation with light, reflection, projection and optics. Some artists who use mirrors, that I have become interested in are, Yayoi Kusama and Niki de Saint Phalle. Yayoi
Kusama made several installations where she used mirror rooms in order to create the illusion of infinite objects. The mirror rooms she constructed also share many attributes with the piece I discuss in Chapter 9. I had also seen the film, *Baraka* and was in awe of a scene that showed a temple with an interior made entirely of mirrored mosaic tiles. The image of reflection and sparkle made me think of my art. A third work relevant to my mirror curtain is Niki De Saint Phalle's sculpture *Tarot Garden* where there is a room with organically formed walls where everything in the space was covered in mirrored mosaic. I have never been fond of the aesthetic of mosaic tiling, so I approached the use of the mirrors differently.

8.3

I imagine that the glass figures are the external shell or protection and the foam figures are like the sensitive fleshy insides. When I was seven years old, I remember when the cicada bugs were at the point in their life cycle that they were shedding their shells, which only happens every thirteen to seventeen years. We lived in a valley on a property that had a lot of trees. One of my most vivid childhood memories is collecting the cicada shells from the trees. My friends and I collected buckets of them. I thought they were so amazing the way the structure of their shells was so perfect and exact, that you could almost not tell that their bodies were not there. I always imagined that when the cicada left their shell they exposed their soft bodies and they were vulnerable. They do not actually leave their shell until
there is another underneath it to protect them, however, I imagine these foam figures as the vulnerable insides of the glass sculptures that I make. The experience of glass is mostly one of a cold, hard, brittle substance. To a glassmaker though, it is the inverse: hot, soft, and invulnerable.

Figure 8.1: Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy, detail
For the viewer, the mirror curtain filtered the strong message I was sending with the foam cutouts and figure on the trampoline. Those two pieces were extremely emotional for me and almost held too much sadness, negativity, and exhaustion. By distorting the perspective of the viewer with the mirrors, the piece became more about the lesson of reflecting upon oneself. I remember what to do to not end up in the place of over exhaustion, the way that the figures inside the room seem to exhibit. Therefore, the foam cutouts and trampoline are something (exhaustion) that is being held in the room.

8.4

The lesson instilled into this piece is the idea that more often than we expect, we have control of how busy we are and how much energy is placed towards the different aspects of life. In hectic day-to-day life, it is difficult to notice this because everything is made to seem so urgent. I think of the installation as a meditation. I can reflect upon myself in the mirror and the scenario of exhaustion, held safely at a distance in the room, and remember to hold onto my energy.
Figure 8.2: Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy,
installation view
Figure B.3: Holding Exhaustion/ Gaining Energy, participation view
CHAPTER 9
SUMERU

9.1
My inspiration for this piece came from Niki De Saint Phalle's larger than life sculptures that are both figurative and architectural. My favorite work of hers is the architectural scale female figure named Minotaur lying in a birthing position with a funhouse on the inside. The interaction that the viewer was able to have made De Saint Phalle's Minotaur compelling to me. I aspire to make art that is of a more architectural scale that people can interact with. I often wonder what the interior of my glass sculptures would look like if I could make them the size of a house. It was out of my means to actually build a house, but a room coated with glitter seemed like it could have the energy of what I imagined on the inside of the glass figures. De Saint Phalle's playgrounds and castles are a more elaborate version of what I was making with Sumers, but I think that they create a similar experience with playful characters, reflection, bright colors and energetic, animated forms.
Figure 9.1: [Image] by Niki de Saint Phalle
(Hatje)
Sumeru is a space that I created to define a boundary between our internal selves and the exterior world. It is named after Mt. Meru, a mountain in Buddhist theology that is the place of enlightenment. In the Mahayana system of Buddhism, everyone goes to Mt. Meru while they are practicing to gain enlightenment. Therefore, according to Buddhist practice, all enlightenment happens on Mt. Meru, because Meru is ubiquitous and occurs wherever your mind envisions it. Similar to Buddhist belief, Sumeru is a place of enlightenment.

In Buddhist teachings Meru exists in the “heart mind” which is essentially the imagination. To attain enlightenment is to achieve human perfection and it is the ultimate goal in most sects of Buddhism. There are several levels that must be reached on the way to this ultimate goal and often the levels are different paradises covered with jewels as well as other types of fantasy environments.

Inspired partly by this concept, the inside of Sumeru is my paradise of enlightenment and outside it offers the viewer the opportunity to see my paradise through different perspectives. In my imagination, looking at infinity is sitting in a room with walls of glitter. The title Sumeru means your personal Meru, and this piece is my vision of what my place of enlightenment would be.
From the outside, the viewer sees a whimsical drawing of several characters. Each character has a symbol made of glass. These glass symbols are ports that act as the filter between the people on the inside and outside of the room. When a viewer looks through them, the opposite side of the wall is distorted. This distortion is a surprise that maintains the interest of the viewer.

The painting on the exterior of Stupart was influenced by the urban graphic style of spray-painting graffiti. I used spray-paint because it comes in neon colors. The outside ended up having a carnival appearance, but in the end I think that it worked with the overall style of the entire show. Meru made the rest of the work in the show cohesive because it combined the elements of glitter, neon colors, my characters, clear glass and holographic material. All of these are elements in the work dispersed throughout the room.

Inside of the room, the viewer experiences a glittery space that has optical viewing ports. Each view port has its own shape that symbolizes parts of the language I use when making my characters. The mass and distorted optical quality of the glass pieces comment on the experience we have when interacting with the world. Our experience is entirely dependant upon our own perspective and immediate attitude. 'We can only view the world through our own experience. In contrast, the world outside of us is viewing
us through the same ports but having an entirely different experience. There is glitter on the interior that represents the initial spark of delight and potential in an individual. The people on the exterior only have a small portal to view the glittery internal environment; therefore, there is a boundary between what those on the interior and those on the exterior are able to understand about each other. To me, understanding that everyone has their own perception is a very valuable element of being gentle with ourselves and those around us. It is easy to simply see what we see through our own eyes and not take into account the fact that everyone brings their own experiences and sensitivities to each situation.

9.4
The decision to make Sumeru round was to promote a flow of people going inside and around, and then outside and around. It also creates the illusion that there is always more to see of the sculpture. I also made use of the room where the show was by using one of the poles that was already in the space as the center of the room. The pole made the room the shape of my torus symbol from above by creating the inside dot. This made the entire space about openness and positivity. It also subtly created a path on the inside of the space rather than a stagnant area where people entered and then stayed. People entered and as more people came in, they were shifted around the room. In the same respect, the placement of the round room within the other room advanced the viewer throughout the exhibition space.
Figure 9.2: Sumeru, front exterior
Figure 9.3: Sumeru, back exterior
60
CONCLUSION

People experience emotional highs, lows; ups and downs in their lives, and with all of these experiences come lessons learned. In my art, I strive to showcase the lessons I learned throughout my life, and put them in a positive light. Most of my work is based on emotional experience and my own personal way of recording my observations. My repository of consciousness is the space between my mind and the greater consciousness. This idea is distinctively linked to the argument of whether our consciousness resides in our brain or in the existence of a greater whole. I made the figures like houses to make the body a home for the mind.

Overall, there is a fun and joyful appearance to my work that induces a positive reaction in my audience. Though ideas behind some of the works in Repositories of Consciousness are dramatic and downbeat or complex and theoretical, they are outwardly bright and energetic. In Zen Buddhism happiness is an extreme emotion. Balance or Zen is feeling a medium

63
ground between happy and sad, which is essentially feeling nothing. I believe in the natural balance of life, but I also appreciate the excitement of life.
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APPENDIX A

IMAGES OF RELATED ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Figure A.1: Grain Silo Over Train Tracks
Inspired my early glass figures
Photo by Kami Meighan

67
Figure A.3: Honji Pagoda, 710 A.D. (Huntington, J.)
Figure A.4: Tarot Garden, Interior View
By Niki de Saint Phalle
(Schulz-Hoffman ed.)
Figure A.5: *Peep Show*, Yayoi Kusama
(Zelvansky, Hoptman)
Figure A.6: Substation Light Study
Relates to projections
Figure A.7: Specialist
The best group of figures I ever made.
(Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Golian)